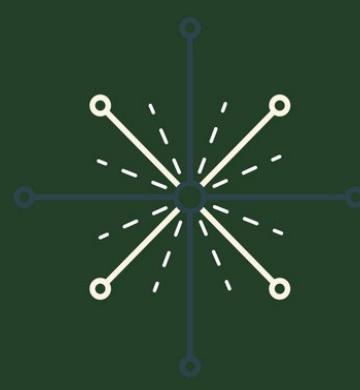


INVINCIBLE SAINT
~SALARYMAN, THE PATH
I WALK TO SURVIVE IN
THIS OTHER WORLD~



BOOK 8 - THE HOLY CITY
KNIGHTS' RAPID
PROGRESS



Invincible Saint

Book 8: The Holy City Knights' Rapid Progress

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Chapter 125: Church Headquarters' reception

After arriving at the Saint Schull Allied Nations and before we complete the procedure to enter the Holy Capital Saint Schull, I stored all the horses except for Fornoir into the Hermit stable so the former slaves and Lionel and the others had to walk on foot.

I totally did not care for such appearances but everyone strongly requested for it so I complied.

“Deviant Saint-sama, welcome back.”

The gate guard called out, causing me to recall the fact that I was called Deviant Saint and gave me indescribably mixed feelings of nostalgia as I gave a wry grin.

I spoke to the gate guard in a hurry while holding such feelings.

“Thank you for the hard work. Has anything changed the past year?”

“Nothing in particular. There hasn’t been any appearance of very strong monsters and there’s not been any serious occurrences.”

“I see. Thank you.”

Without getting off my horse, I directly moved toward the Adventurer’s Guild first.

Within the bustling city, Fornoir’s proud strides drew gazes onto me and voices called out.

“Deviant Saint-sama, welcome back.”

“I’ll be in your care during the Whimsical Day.”

“I look forward to you buying my cooking in large quantities again.”

Hearing those voices, I felt my smile naturally broaden.

“You look like you’re in a good mood.”

“Luciel-sama, why are you grinning just because people called out to you nya?”

“Well, it’s natural since it feels nostalgic. Here, my life won’t be targeted, there aren’t any troublesome work and it is a life where the benefits you get is reflected by the amount of hard work you put in just like a mirror.”

That’s right. So to speak, for me, Meratoni is like my hometown and coming to Saint Schull Allied Nations is like moving to the capital.

Only then did I realise that my shoulder and elbows were feeling fairly stiff recently.

“I wonder why does Luciel-sama have the nickname of Deviant Saint.”

” ... Kefin, I think it’s fine if you don’t worry about that, ah, it will be the Adventurer’s Guild after we turn this corner.”

While having such silly talks, I stopped in front of the Adventurer’s Guild, dismounted Fornoir, and stroked her for a bit before entrusting her care to the healers.

Well, I don’t think anybody will snatch the horse I ride in this Holy Capital but just to be safe.

I entered the Adventurer’s Guild together with the former slaves.

Possibly because it was evening time, the interior of the Adventurer’s Guild was crowded with quite a number of people.

Just by calling out from far away, the adventurers took notice of us.

I smiled and headed for the counter to request for the adventurer’s registration of the former slaves.

“Because these people are able to use magic, even without martial arts skills, would it be possible to register them as adventurers as a special case?”

” ... The decision on whether registration is possible or not will be after I measure them. That decision will be up to the Guildmaster.”

“That’s true. By the way, where’s Granz-san?”

“Currently, he has gone to call the other staffs but the dining hall is slightly busy at this moment so you may have to wait for a while.”

“I understand. Then I’ll leave their measurements to you.”

“Certainly. Well then, the accompanying people, this way please.”

The receptionist began their adventurer's registration and explanation.

I wonder if I inadvertently missed out on some of the contents when I just became an adventurer? I was also listening to the receptionist's talk when Granz-san came.

“Long time no see.”

“Long time no see, Granz-san.”

“It's really been a long time Luciel. Are you still continuing to cook?”

“I haven't been able to do so much lately but I did acquire the skill without noticing.”

“I see. So, why are you here today? I thought you're acting as the representative of Lenith?”

“My term had ended so I wanted to come home for now. After feeling depressed seeing how I could not do anything on my own for the whole year, I came back with the thought to train myself little by little.”

“Are they your retinue?”

“The 3 here are slaves but they are my retinue that I place my trust in.

The others are illegal and debt slaves that are able to use magic so I brought them along to ask if you can register them as adventurers.”

“I see. Alright, I'll accept them.”

“Is it alright?”

“Yeah. Lately, the establishment of connections with the church has been advancing so it's not bad to think of this as part of the business. Naturally, you plan to swing by here to check up on their situation right?”

“Yeah. I intend to spend a few days in the Holy Capital Schull. In the immediate future, I plan to travel between Meratoni and the Holy Capital so I will show my face as much as possible.”

“It's fine then. Moreover, you're shrewdly coming here first before going to the church.”

“Thank you. I’ll take up your kind offer. Also, here is a month’s worth of their food expenses and lodging fees.”

“... Why is Luciel the one paying?”

“I’m in the position I have now because of the kindness from everyone in Meratoni that allowed me to work hard in the Holy Capital Schull. I’m merely passing the baton to the next person.”

“You’re really a nice guy after all. But you’ll be exploited for that you know?”

“I have a pretty dry personality apart from when it involves the exchange of lives so it doesn’t matter.”

“Alright then. I’ll look after these guys.”

“Thank you.”

With my introduction of Granz-san to the former slaves, I bade farewell to the slaves here.

The slaves were extremely grateful but I told them that their future will depend on their own hard work from now on before leaving the Adventurer’s Guild.

“It looked like you got along pretty well with him.”

“That’s because he was my cooking mentor. In addition, I helped him and was helped by him, giving rise to our relationship now.”

As I replied with a smile, we began walking toward the church headquarters together with Estia and the others who were waiting.

For the sake of when the need arises, I informed Kefin and Cathy of the accommodation locations before arriving but I was still anxious as to what kind of reception they would receive as we head to the entrance.

“This sure is nostalgic too.”

Lionel and the others acted their part as slaves and Estia and the others had strained expressions on their faces so nobody reacted to my murmurings.

There were 2 receptionist ladies but they were both acquaintances so I gave some simple greetings before jumping straight to the topic.

“Could you please help me call Catherine-san and Granhart-san?”

“Certainly. Please wait a moment.”

Both of them held separate magic communication beads and began communicating by shutting their eyes and concentrating.

While feeling surprised that there were 2 magic communication beads, I waited for the receptionists to finish their correspondence.

“We have received the message from Catherine-sama and Granhart-sama requesting that you wait here.”

“I see. Thank you.”

It felt like a weird time to pass souvenirs to the 2 receptionist ladies but I still decided to hand them honey candies from my magic bag.

Even though I’m not hated by other receptionists, it would be a huge shock to be hated by my own company’s receptionists.

“Ah, that’s right. These are some candies made from honey but if it’s alright with you, do you mind tasting it and letting me know what you think of it?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. Since I’m thinking of releasing it as a new item made from honey in lenith. Here you go.”

〔Thank you very much!〕

The 2 of them immediately placed it in their mouths and they smiled broadly at once.

I don’t know the cause as to why the sweet taste wasn’t promoted in this world. However, I made a guts pose in my heart thinking that the decision to make the honey factory wasn’t a wrong choice.

After listening to the receptionist ladies’ impression on the honey candies, Catherine-san and Granhart-san arrived.

Then, Catherine placed her hand on the hilt of her sword.

“It’s been a long time, the 2 of you. The 3 people here are slaves but they have already cleared the slave contract dispel conditions and are my retinue. The people on this side are not slaves but they are the people affiliated with the

church that I spoke of with Pope-sama.”

After I conveyed that, Catherine posed a question to me without changing her posture.

“Luciel-kun, welcome back. Nevertheless, do you know who is the person next to you that you have brought here?”

Next to me? It would be Lionel.

“Yeah. Ex-General Sen’oni from the Elimasia Empire. I purchased him when he was sold as a slave in Ienith.”

“... But there has been rumours about General Sen’oni rampaging on the battlefield lately?”

“That can’t be true. Because for this whole year, he’s been acting as my guard without rest. Nevertheless, so Catherine-san is acquainted with Lionel.”

“I’ve seen several of his battles. If one mentions General Lionel of the Empire, him running across the battlefield on his horse and the sight of him swinging his spear is truly like an Oni.”

“That’s true but what about it?”

I have heard of such things regarding Lionel but it’s not like such rumours can dispel what has happened the past year.

“That was my job after all. It can’t be helped that I’m seen as a mass murderer from the eyes of other countries.”

“In addition to you being a combat maniac right. Catherine-san, what is wrong with bringing them into the church headquarters while they are still slaves?”

I finally heard what I wanted to hear.

“... There’s no problem. Since slaves are defined as a person’s personal belongings. Well if there was a problem, Luciel-kun would not be able to escape punishment regardless of your rank as S-rank healer.”

“What about the 2 beastmen here?”

“Although there are a lot of pro-human activists, the church itself does not endorse such behaviour in particular so I guess there are no problems.”

“That’s great. Then, I’ll leave their hearing to Granhart-san. If there’s no issue, I would like Catherine-san to lead me to Pope-sama. Since I still can’t reach Pope-sama’s room on my own even until now ...”

The atmosphere calmed down slightly after I said that laughingly.

“To give me orders, Luciel-kun sure has become admirable. But to not be able to go to Pope-sama’s room on your own ... you sure haven’t changed in that aspect. Alright. Will your retinue be coming to have an audience too?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

While feeling grateful that Catherine-san showed concern for me, I discerned that the silent Granhart-san was a person who does not speak in front of his supervisors as we were led by Catherine-san and began moving to Pope-sama’s room.

Chapter 126: Luciel's desire

Estia and the others were led by Granhart-san and we parted with them at the magic-driven elevator.

Me, Lionel and the others, and the former slaves followed behind Catherine in that order and we arrived in front of Pope-sama's room. (TL: I thought the former slaves were left at the Adventurer's Guild? The author didn't mention the former slaves after this so it's most likely a typo.) Catherine knocked on the door before conveying her business.

"Pope-sama, this is Catherine. S-rank healer Luciel-sama has returned so I have guided him here."

I didn't know why I was affixed with sama by Catherine-san but I heard Pope-sama's voice before I could ask.

"Enter."

As usual, after hearing the dignified voice, Catherine-san opened the door to Pope-sama's private room.

"Excuse me."

"Excuse me."

I entered the room after Catherine-san and Lionel and the others entered silently.

The interior of Pope-sama's room was the same as before with blinder partitions installed in the middle so that her face couldn't be seen.

While paying homage, I waited for Pope-sama to speak.

"Luciel, it's been a long time. The mere thought of how much effort you've put in for the church the past 1 year gives me an immense sense of gratitude towards you."

"Your words are wasted on me. I somehow moved about in confusion and was able to overcome the odds together with my retinue behind me."

“I see that your humility has not changed. What would you like as a reward for going to Ienith and firmly re-building the Healer’s Guild?”

This time, I told people that I returned to the church headquarters to report but I have been reporting to Pope-sama for almost every single step of the way.

Because of that, I came here just for the sake of requesting the content of my personal reward.

Also, I had already decided on what I would request for.

But, whether it would go through or not depended on Pope-sama’s mood.

” … Then I will say it without reserve. I wish to travel to the city in the sky, Independent Magic City Nelldal, once.”

” … For what reason?”

“It is related to the labyrinth I cleared previously.”

I can’t speak of the dragon seals and of information relating to the Spirits to people other than Pope-sama and Catherine-san.

Also, since I have not memorised any magic other than Holy attribute magic, my desire to be able to attack from a distance was also included.

” … It can’t be done immediately but are you okay with that?”

“Yes. I don’t intend to rush it immediately but I would be happy if the preparations to enter the country is done ahead of time.”

” … Is it also related to the increase of activity for the labyrinth in Ienith? I guess because the surrounding monsters also became stronger too … so, what are your plans hereafter?”

“Yes. I plan to temporarily travel to Meratoni and train by returning to basics.

Once that is over, I will travel to the Dwarf Kingdom once to collect my retinue’s equipment and head to Nelldal if I get authorization or if that can’t be done, head to Labyrinth Nation Grandol.”

“I see. If the transfer arrangements to Nelldal can be done, it is possible to transfer from the Holy Capital.”

” … That way of saying it means that I would only be able to travel to Nelldal

from the Holy Capital?"

"Transfer is possible from all major cities of each country but similar to job change, approval will take time."

"I see ... speaking of job change, I became rank X in my Healer job the other day. If it's possible, could I request for a job promotion this time?"

"Oo! As expected of Luciel. To elevate the Healer job so such a high degree. Everyone else can leave. Could I be alone with Luciel for the time being?" Catherine and the attendants bowed and left the room.

Similarly, Lionel and the others looked at me and bowed before leaving.

After the door closed, Pope-sama came down from her throne and walked over.

She's beautiful after all but I felt that she vaguely resembled Sir Rainstar as I spoke.

"I am extremely delighted to be bestowed the opportunity to lay eyes on your countenance. Thank you."

"Your face looks a lot more like an adult compared to a year ago. There's also the case with Ienith but by protecting Rockford, you've indeed helped me."

"It was thanks to my retinue as well."

While giving a wry grin, I requested for a lecture regarding job promotion.

"During job promotion, is there anything required of me to do?"

"There isn't any. If anything, it would be to choose the job you wish to have from the multiple job choices you have."

"Could I still use Healing Magic without problems if I choose a different job?"

"... It is a risk depending on the job. It might even become weaker compared to now. However, it does not necessarily mean that you can't choose another job so you don't have to worry about it."

"I see. Please go ahead then."

"Sit here and close your eyes."

“Yes.”

I followed Pope-sama’s words and sat down in a meditative posture and waited.

Pope-sama placed her hand on my head and weaved a chant but I completely could not comprehend the meaning of the words.

“... You may open your eyes.”

It felt like only about one minute had passed before I was spoken to.

“So may I know what were the possible job promotions?”

“... There was only Spirit Knight. Sorry, but could you put your job promotion on hold for the time being?”

Normally speaking, Spirit Knight should be a rare job without a doubt so it should be something to be happy about but Pope-sama lost the vigour she previously held.

I tried asking about it just in case it meant what I thought it meant.

“... Is it because I would not be able to use Holy attribute magic if I become a Spirit Knight?”

“Yes, that will happen because the Holy attribute does not exist among Spirits. It’s a great pity even though I had expected to see the Philosopher/Sage job but I would like it if you give up on your job promotion.” (TL: I always thought that Philosopher was a title which was why I translated it as such but now that it’s mentioned as a job ... it would be wiser to translate it as Sage ... so from now on Philosopher would be changed to Sage. I won’t have time to change all the older chapters so it’ll start from this chapter.) “... As expected, it would hurt to not be able to use Healing Magic so I would also like to request to remain how I am now.”

“I see. It might be possible that the Blessing of the Spirits is interfering with it but long ago, I heard that the Sage was promoted automatically. It must have certain conditions.”

It might be possible to become a Sage if I release the seals on the dragons and obtain the blessing from all Spirits but ... to achieve that, it would be insufficient

no matter how many lives I have.

Apart from that, the thought of the future where I would not be able to use Healing magic crossed my mind for a moment so maybe I should make preparations for when that future arrives?

It was vague but I began thinking about it.

“If you are in Meratoni, it would be fine to send in a scheduled report once every month. At that time, I will most likely also speak of the progress of the negotiations to Nelldal.”

“Understood. Ah, that’s right. Regarding the hearing of the 5 former slaves that has begun, they are connected to the Elimasia Empire so if you obtain any background, please contact me as well.”

“Fumu. Alright. Don’t try to do anything too irrational.”

“Yes. In the future, I will still commit to the goal of dying of old age and to work hard for the sake of the church.”

“... Luciel, I am truly sorry for saddling you with this burden. If there’s anything I can do, you can depend on me okay?”

“Thank you. I plan to not take such flashy action in the future but if I need aid I will consult you first and foremost.”

“I’ll entrust it to you.”

As we both exchanged smiles, I was unusually offered to shake hands and left the room.

The feeling of Pope-sama’s hand was really nice but it would be rude to keep holding on to her hand so I conveyed my thanks and left Pope-sama’s private room.

After opening the door and exiting, I heaved a sigh that diverted my tension but the sensation remained intact.

“That was nerve wrecking~, eh, Catherine-san, what’s wrong?”

The strange situation of Catherine-san lowering her head to Lionel as if begging was happening.

The person who spoke out about the phenomenon in front of me was not Catherine-san but Lionel.

"Luciel-sama, would it be okay to accept the request to have a mock battle with the Paladin Corps?"

I held my head for Lionel's battle mania that did not betray my expectations as well as the fact that I completely forgot that Catherine-san was also a combat maniac.

However, I had no choice but to permit their decision to feel each other out.

Since Catherine-san's eyes were serious.

With the conditions to not die and to not cause death, I reluctantly gave my approval for the mock battle.

Chapter 127: Mock Battle

Brought along by Catherine-san, we walked down the maze-like corridor for the first time in a while before arriving at the Valkyrie Paladin Corps training ground.

“The fact that you’ve brought us to the Valkyrie Paladin Corps’ training ground means that?”

When I asked Catherine-san, she replied with a grin.

“Yeah, I’d have you all conduct a mock battle with these girls (Valkyrie Paladin Corps). The other 2 apart from General Sen’oni look considerably strong as well and wouldn’t it be better to have these girls who know Luciel-kun’s actual ability as opponents to find out how much Luciel-kun has grown?”

I could comprehend that it has already been decided that I would also be participating in the mock battle and that I could not escape.

However, I will not give up until the end.

“It’s going to be dinner time soon and we must find a place to stay so can’t we have it at a later date?”

“To think that you would want to have a mock battle at a later date as well, you sure have became indomitable unbeknownst to me. Furthermore, if it’s for the slaves that Luciel-kun brought along, we’ve properly prepared guest rooms for them so be at ease.”

I can’t feel at ease at all and why do I feel an overwhelming sense of Déjà vu?

While weeping in my heart, I gave up on resisting.

The Valkyrie Paladin Corps have already formed up and were waiting for us ... ?

“Why have they already formed ranks?”

“Of course, that’s because this is the predetermined route after all.”

Catherine-san said with a smile.

When I looked over, Lumina-san saluted and spoke.

“Luciel-sama, it’s been a long time. Please treat us well during today’s mock battle.”

I don’t know the reason, maybe it’s because the ranks have been reversed or that Lionel and the others are around but, I just want to say a single thing.

” ... Lumina-san, everyone else too, it’s fine to use the same tone as in the past. If that can’t be done, at least limit it to when there aren’t any other people around. The hairs on my back would stand if everyone uses honorific language towards me.”

“As expected, Luciel-kun hasn’t changed at all.”

“Even though I’ve went through all the trouble of planning to sincerely beat him up during the mock battle if he acted all self-importantly.”

Continuing after Lumina, Lucy spoke while smiling before each and everyone began talking such that I could no longer keep up with them.

“Did you become slightly stronger?”

“Lipnea and I would present to you an introduction to our dual-sword technique.”

“Eh? I’m doing it too?”

“Of course.”

Elizabeth, who has not trained in her dual-sword technique at all lately, tried to say so to Lipnea to make an excuse but she could not successfully convey her intentions.

Then, the sound of clapping hands could be heard.

“I understand that everyone is feeling delighted for the reunion but we’re pressed for time so let’s start the battle immediately.”

『Yes!』

The merry mood that was on until then was completely reversed and switched to a combat mood.

“To start with, it’s alright if it is your personal opinion Luciel-kun but how many versus how many do you think would be good for the mock battle?”

“Let’s see. If we’re allowing magic then 10 from the Valkyrie Paladin Corps and 4 of us? Of course, that’s if Catherine-san acts as the referee, but I believe that would be a good match.”

“Luciel-kun, it sounds like that remark is saying that we, the Valkyrie Paladin Corps, is weak though?”

“Lumina-san, that is not true. If I fight all of you one versus one, I believe I would be completely defeated. However, even though they have slave identities for certain reasons, my retinue are all considerably excellent. Also, the balance of combat styles may also play a part.”

Once I finished saying that, Catherine-san gave a bold smile and spoke.

“Luciel-kun, it’s really fine for 10 versus 4 right? Lumina, other than cutting the heart and neck, anything else goes so do coach them with all your might. Luciel-kun too, don’t get done in easily okay?”

As might be expected, Catherine-san was angered by my remark but if she knows about Lionel’s true strength, then her remark is instead too thoughtless.

My Area Barrier’s effect has improved quite considerably as well. I became worried for the girls who did not know about that.

“What about the weapons?”

“As long as it’s not directed at the vitals or beheading, it can be treated if it’s Luciel-kun right?”

“That’s not a problem but … is it a mock battle assuming that it is actual combat?”

“Yeah. That would make both sides mutually feel a sense of tension right?”

When I turned to Lionel and the others, they smiled and nodded.

“Understood. When does the combat start?”

“We’ll gather in the middle and this time, we’ll start after taking a distance of 30 steps.”

“Alright.”

Thus, for the purpose of conducting the mock battle, we gathered at the

middle, waited for Catherine's cue for the start and the combat began.

I invoked 「Area Barrier」 using 「Chant Termination」 as Lionel stood in front of me and Cathy and Kefin flew out for the sake of hit-and-run attacks.

Five members from the Valkyrie Paladin Corps ran towards Cathy and Kefin while the remaining 5 members started running towards me and Lionel.

“Should I prioritize defence? Or do I press them with force?”

“I cannot affirm the opponent's abilities from what we've seen so we'll think about it after receiving their attacks.”

“Affirmative.”

Lumina-san, Saran-san, Myra-san, Beatrice-san, and Kathy-san rained down attacks onto Lionel from multiple angles. Against that, Lionel took a single step back and swung his large shield and greatsword, the girls hit by that were instantaneously blown away. (TL: There was a Cathy previously in the Valkyrie Paladin Corps but I'll translate it as Kathy from here on to avoid confusion with our Cat Beastwoman Cathy) During that gap, a sword pierced Lionel.

However, the wound didn't appear deep so I immediately performed a Heal for the sake of stopping the bleeding and sent a barrier toward Lionel with Magic Circle Chant.

At the same time, I also continued to apply barrier and heal to Cathy and Kefin who were performing hit-and-run attacks.

If their injuries are immediately healed as if having All Regeneration, their movement capabilities would not drop.

As if such worries are unnecessary, though she had taken wounds to the extent of scratches, Cathy was dodging attacks while certainly dealing damage to the girls by performing counter attacks.

Kefin was also using all his ninjutsu, luring friendly fire by disappearing like a fog while buying time by detonating his art of body replacement dummy even when they think they've hit him.

That was when the match sped up.

Maybe they thought that as expected it would be bad if this continued, Saran-

san who was blown away and Elizabeth-san who was at Kefin's place took a detour and, perhaps targeting me, launched an attack towards us.

"Even though it's not constructed purely for attack power, there's no choice huh ..."

I transformed the illusionary cane in my right hand into illusionary sword and channelled magic into it, pulled out a shield from my magic bag and held it with my left hand, and decided to match their 2 swords with my illusionary sword while defending my vitals.

At the same time their 2 swords struck my illusionary sword, I slashed out.

I took advantage of the chance to firstly send the dual-sword user Elizabeth-san flying with a kick and then performed a rotation and bashed Saran-san with my shield.

Because their weapons were destroyed, the surprised 2 stopped their movements.

While thinking that the reason for their defeat was because they struck the illusionary sword without knowing it's capabilities, Elizabeth-san and Saran-san didn't let their guard down and distanced themselves from Lionel and the others to recover.

Even while wounded, due to Elizabeth-san who has multiple number of moves leaving the combat, Kefin went on the offensive with ninjutsu that I saw for the first time.

Without receiving an attack even once, Kefin led Lipnea-san, Maruruka-san, and Lucy-san by the nose as they were dyed with fresh red blood.

"Lionel, do you need assistance?"

"... Hmm. Could Luciel-sama defeat them one-by-one?"

"Alright."

While receiving attacks, Lionel blew Kathy-san towards me.

To face the wounded Kathy-san, I readied my illusionary sword.

"That sword is foul play. This weapon was expensive so please don't break it."

“Then please declare your surrender and join Elizabeth-san and Saran-san.”

“Alright. I concede to that weapon.”

Despite her minimal number of words, Kathy-san declared her defeat due to the difference in weapon performance.

Even so, I was pleased for winning against the girls for the first time.

In the meantime, Cathy and Kefin proceeded to defeat the members of the Valkyrie Paladin Corps whose movement capabilities dropped due to their wounds.

Pushed into resigning, only Lumina-san remained.

“Way too impregnable. What nonsense.”

Lumina-san muttered that, sent out a continuous attack of the strongest attacks she could pull forth but, Lionel defended against all of it with his large shield.

“Since Luciel-sama’s 「Area Barrier」 is not something ordinary.”

” ... I’ve forgotten.”

“Are you sure you want to look away?”

Lionel swung his large sword and Lumina avoided it but she stopped when swords hit the scruff of her neck.

No, to be accurate, she was made to stop.

Cathy and Kefin had finished moving over unnoticed and their swords formed a cross at her neck over her shoulder from behind.

“Fu~. You’ve chosen good retainers Luciel-kun. To think that we would be defeated by smaller numbers.”

“Thank you. So, this time it will be our victory so I’ll start healing everyone.”

“Thank you.”

When we headed to Catherine-san, she nodded with a smile and announced the winner.

“The winners are Luciel-kun and his retinue.”

While thinking that she has no naming sense, I healed everyone's injuries by invoking 「Area High Heal」 with 「Magic Circle Chant」 and I thought that today's plans ended with that.

However, reality is uncertain after all.

“Well then, it looks like Luciel-kun’s level has increased as well so why don’t you have a mock battle with me to test your strength and see if you have truly became stronger instead of just your skills getting stronger.”

“Eh? I don’t want to though.”

“But we only found out that your weapon is amazing, without knowing your true strength, I won’t know when you would require assistance or not right?”

After that, Catherine-san would not listen to anything I say.

“It’s time for dinner today so if it’s tomorrow morning ...”

By saying those words, I could no longer escape from Catherine-san and the Valkyrie Paladin Corps.

” ... Have I reached a stage where I can’t reject the request of people who helped me when I was in trouble?”

Although there wasn’t anybody who showed a reaction to my murmurings, Lionel and Catherine-san were conversing and Cathy and Kefin were happily speaking with the girls without being looked down upon as beastmen, so I thought “Oh well”.

At that point in time, I had no way of knowing that the next day, the scale of the mock battle would develop to such an unthinkable scale.

Chapter 128: Shadowing

After our mock battle with the Valkyrie Paladin Corps led by Lumina-san ended, we, including Catherine-san, came to the dining hall together.

Rosa-san, who was my nostalgic date partner, looked like she was busy working in the kitchen.

“Rosa-san, good evening.”

Upon calling out, Rosa-san lifted her face and greeted me with a smile when she recognized my face.

“Luciel-sama, it’s been a long time. Did you just return today?”

“Yeah. Nevertheless, the dining hall sure is calm as usual.”

“I hope that they would at least enjoy themselves during meals though ... although it hasn’t changed since from long ago.”

“So I was the peculiar one right. Ah, is it alright if I request for the usual mountain-large serving?”

“Leave it to me, wait a moment okay.”

Rosa-san said so as she entered the back of the kitchen. At around the same time, I heard Catherine-san’s voice from behind me.

“Luciel-kun, you’re getting along well with Rosa-san as usual.”

When I turned around, Catherine-san and Lumina-san were standing there. (TL: Do I detect jealousy? xD)

“Well, that’s right ... but it’s normal right? Since it is more pleasant to be harmonious. In work, in meals and in life, it’s better for it to be pleasant compared to dull right?”

When I replied so with a smile, Catherine-san and Lumina-san laughed.

While thinking that including the 2 of them, the Valkyrie Paladin Corps sure is a collection of beautiful women after all, I persuaded myself that I am now more interested in practicality over aesthetics so it is irrelevant to me.

While having such thoughts, I looked in the direction of Lionel and the others and saw that each and every one of the Valkyrie Paladin Corps members looked like they were flowers in bloom, delighted as they talked about various contents.

When I asked about it at a later date, apparently they were interested because usually, they do not have the opportunity to converse with a former general from the Empire and with beastmen.

In the meantime, Rosa-san called out to me.

“Here thanks for waiting. There’re more servings so come back again if there’s not enough.”

“Thank you.”

I took the dish from Rosa-san with a smile and moved to a large table which could sit everyone.

Catherine-san and Lumina-san sat in front of me and everyone else sat down after a little while.

Maybe because they were my retainers even though they were slaves or because they were overwhelmed by them during the mock battle, everyone from the Valkyrie Paladin Corps did not show reluctance in sitting together with Lionel and the others.

Rather than that, they were hit with a barrage of questions and it was interesting to watch Lionel and the others answer while enjoying themselves even though they were slightly bewildered.

I also talked with Catherine-san and Lumina-san as we took our meal.

“I’ve not really heard of many changes this one year but have the impressions of everyone towards the established price setting changed slightly?”

“I’ve not left the church headquarters but from the reports, it doesn’t really seem like the healers think favourably of it. However, it looks like the children that have just become healers repeatedly continued to chant as taught by Luciel-kun, resulting in reports of their skill levels rising considerably faster compared to previous years.”

“We, the Valkyrie Paladin Corps also received complaints when we established

the price setting and guidelines during our expeditions but they were all from those who have worked multiple years. Conversely, after knowing about the pricings, the cases where citizens thanked us was greater than ever and the crimes in places with church branches have also apparently decreased.”

“Why would the crimes decrease?”

I don’t remember doing anything to improve the public security so I couldn’t understand why.

“Because the healing fee is set, the fear towards getting injured has been eased slightly so the stress adventurers in particular feel have most likely decreased. The decrease in fellows who resort to burglary and thievery to earn gold seems to be a factor. The healer acquaintances I have belonging to other countries also said so.”

“I’m glad to hear that the fee revision and guidelines are getting accepted better than I had imagined. I was even considering new methods if it didn’t work out. Pope-sama didn’t contact me at all regarding it so I was slightly anxious.”

While giving a bitter smile, I brought the food to my mouth.

“Including Pope-sama and Archbishop-samas, I am also enquiring about the guidelines so you don’t need to worry. Leaving that aside, I’ve heard that the desk work you had in Lenith was dreadful but it looks like you still managed to continue your training.”

“That is the hard word required in order to live life safely. Furthermore, my retinue loves mock battles so thanks to that, there was almost not a day without training.”

The instant I replied with that, Catherine-san and Lumina-san asked about Lionel and the others with serious expressions.

“... It’s a serious topic but how did General Lionel become your retainer? In the first place, why did he become a slave?”

“He’s the Empire’s hero who rose to prominence with the name of General Sen’Oni you know? He can even be said to be a figure to the extent whereby the Elimasia Empire would have been swallowed up quickly by its neighbouring countries if he was not around.”

So both Catherine-san and Lumina-san knew about Lionel.

Since the 2 of them praised him like that, Lionel's strength when he was serving as a general must have been amazing.

I've been reminded on a regular basis that he's not of a regular class but to actually have acquaintances speak of his greatness once again reminds me of it.

"I don't know if you will believe me but I did purchase Lionel and Cathy from a slave dealer. In particular, Lionel was in a condition where he could not move both his feet."

"In the first place, why did you buy slaves? You should have departed together with a number of healers and Priest Knights."

"Because the Healer's Guild was buried in the slums district and you were attacked right?"

While feeling that I would like the 2 of them to talk slightly more gently as they were using military tones, I continued to conversation.

"Yeah. The public security was worse than expected and I felt that I can't expect the Priest Knights to guard the place without sleep or rest. In addition, I wanted my own bodyguards so I went to the slave dealer. Then, Lionel stood out when he acted as if nothing happened when I applied intimidation and because luckily I could heal Lionel's feet, I asked him to protect me."

"Your luck was seriously good."

"... The fact that slaves are also humans have not changed. Don't forget that okay?"

"Yeah. I intend to interact with them as my retainers instead of as my slaves."

I'll not touch on the case where Lionel and the others told Catherine-san and Lumina-san how kindly/naively I treat slaves. (TL: This 'kindly' is with a slightly negative connotation. We all know how he treats slaves. Kind/naive/honest/innocent/sincere. There isn't really a word to translate the Japanese word 甘い used in this context imo.) "By visiting other countries, have you understood how Saint Schull's Allied Nations is the headquarters for Healers?"

“Yeah. It’s really great that Meratoni was the first city I arrived at. If it was Lenith, my life as a healer would have checkmated. Thinking that in the future Lenith will become a city kind to Healers just like Meratoni somewhat gives me a sense of accomplishment.”

“I see. Speaking of which, regarding tomorrow’s mock battle, would it be fine if your retainers have a mock battle as well?”

Hmm? The conversation content somehow feels like it has changed quite a bit but I tried asking Lionel and the others.

“Lionel, Cathy, Kefin. Are you all able to participate in the mock battle?”

“If Luciel-sama wishes so. Personally, it is something I greatly welcome as preparation for my fight with Whirlwind in Meratoni.”

Lionel said so as the representative but was it because they have the ability so they didn’t complain?

Cathy and Kefin also silently nodded so it was decided that the 3 of them would participate but I did not miss the gleam in Catherine-san and Lumina-san’s eyes.

Probably because today’s mock battle was a complete victory, their flames seem to have been lit so our stay would most likely be a couple of days.

After dinner, because Catherine-san told me that my personal room was maintained as it was, I returned to my personal room and Lionel and the others moved to the guest rooms.

“It’s already quite late but maybe I’ll spend some time in the Labyrinth of Tribulations ... Ah, Fornoir and the others are still in the Hermit’s stable. I’ll be having Yanbus-san look after them for a couple of days so I should head to the stable first.”

I began walking towards the Valkyrie Paladin Corps training ground.

When I first walked the path, the way to the stable felt like it was a maze but I just walked from there so I could completely remember it, just as I was about to reach the Paladin Corps training ground, I discovered Estia ahead of me.

“What on earth is Estia doing here? ... Rather than that, why is she able to

travel in this maze-like church without getting lost?"

Thinking that Estia's movements were suspicious, I took my distance and shadowed Estia while making sure she didn't notice.

Chapter 129: Spirit and Spirit

When I chased after Estia, I discovered that instead of going to the Valkyrie Paladin Corps training grounds, she went towards the official entrance of the stable which I didn't even know about.

"... It looked like she entered here? Why would Estia need to come to the stable?"

I tilted my head as I gently opened the door to the entrance of the stable.

Since it was night time, the magic lamps in the stable were lit in the lowest setting, giving the place a dim feeling but visibility was maintained.

While peering around as I moved forward, I found Estia's figure peeping into each and every one of the stalls.

"Is there nobody else around other than the manager Yanbus-san? Is she only looking for a horse? Or is she looking for Fornoir?"

Questions popped into my head one after the other but Estia looked like she was disappointed when she finished peeping into the stalls and backtracked towards my direction.

I quickly hid inside one of the empty stalls.

It didn't look like she noticed me so before I chased after Estia, I tentatively checked all the stalls and found that all the horses were sound sleep.

"Did Estia make them sleep?"

Was there a reason why she made them sleep?

While thinking about that, I also confirmed that Yanbus-san and the 2 other caretakers were asleep at the rest area.

"Did Estia cause them to sleep?"

I applied 「Recover」 and woke the 3 of them up.

"Fu~Ah? Ain't it Luciel-sama?"

"Good evening Yanbus-san. Were you napping in the middle of your duty?"

”... I was asleep?”

“Yes. You don’t remember?”

“That’s bad! Hey, you guys wake up.”

Yanbus-san woke the 2 caretakers and went to peek into the stalls.

“Did Estia make them sleep? Or did the Darkness Spirit do it? ... Although I’ve told Pope-sama, I have no choice but to find out about Estia’s intention to know if bringing her here was the correct choice.”

Losing the desire to head for the Labyrinth of Tribulations, I called out to Yanbus-san and returned to my own room.

I was honestly surprised when I returned to my own room.

”? Estia, why are you here? Rather than that, how did you know that this is my room?”

Estia was waiting in front of my room.

After I called out to Estia, she looked slightly troubled as she began speaking.

“Luciel-sama, I have a request. Could you please let me meet that horse once again?”

”... Are you referring to Fornoir when you say that horse?”

“Yes. The black horse that Luciel-sama rode on.”

After saying that, Estia lowered her head.

“I’ll be honest. I am wary towards Estia.”

“Eh?”

A seriously surprised expression was on the face that looked up.

If this was an act, I’ll never be able to see through her lies.

I’ll be forced to yield if that’s the case ... I spoke as that thought passed through my mind.

“Even in the Dwarf Kingdom, there were those who lost their memories regarding you, Estia. And then, this time, you walked to the stable without getting lost and either under the direction of the Darkness Spirit or by borrowing

the strength of the Darkness Spirit, you made Yanbus-san and the horses sleep, so I am conflicted as to how to deal with you.”

The Darkness Spirit may have saved Estia from her predicament but I must make a decision if she were to use that for evil.

I must remove all harm that can befall people related to the church, Pope-sama first and foremost. The only person who can do so is me as I can't be affected by status abnormalities and I also have the responsibility for bringing Estia here.

However, Estia showed me an unexpected reaction.

”... Ha~ oh Luciel. I'll also give you my blessing so let me see elder sister.”

”... What are you saying?! Are you not Estia?”

“You should have noticed it vaguely right? I want to meet elder sister so I borrowed Estia's body to appear in front of you.”

Different from before, I was starting to feel overwhelming pressure.

“Darkness Spirit? Why did you imitate Estia after possessing her body? Furthermore, the person I was talking to just now should have been the real Estia.”

“Hou. So you can tell to that extent. That's because Estia was awake until just earlier.”

Perhaps because it had possessed Estia's body, I was beginning to hear 2 voices.

”... What is your goal? What do you mean by elder sister? Rather than that, what are you making Estia do?”

“You're nothing but questions huh. I was just tired of listening to Estia. So, I induced Estia to move to the stable and I merely made the humans who saw this child sleep for the sake of this child who has a fear of strangers. It's not like I harmed them.”

“It might be trivial to you Spirits but to the humans who were affected by Estia, it was an obstructive behaviour to their duties. Did you not notice me chasing after Estia?”

“Ha~ I did notice. My goal is to meet elder sister and apologize. As you see, I hope you can let me see elder sister.”

The Darkness Spirit-possessed Estia lowered her head.

Because I couldn't feel the usual pride that Spirits usually possess, it felt slightly anticlimactic but integrating everything the Darkness Spirit had previously said, there was only 1 existence that it has been calling elder sister.

“Fornoir is your ... the elder sister to the Darkness Spirit?”

“Yes. So please.”

I chantlessly invoked 「Sanctuary Circle」, 「Dispel」, and 「Recover」.

“To try to figure out if I'm a malevolent being, you sure are quite prudent.”

The Darkness spirit possessing Estia gave an unsuitable laughter.

” ... They totally don't work huh.”

“With me being the Darkness Spirit, there are many who misunderstand but I am not a malevolent being in particular.”

” ... So it seems.”

“Please, let me meet elder sister.”

“This may be pointless but do you swear to not harm the spirit Fornoir?”

“There's no way I would do something like that to elder sister ... I swear.”

Believing in the Darkness Spirit that showed a human gesture for but a moment, I took out my Key of the Hermit and opened the door without minding that we're in the middle of the corridor.

“Please speak from here. As long as Fornoir doesn't wish to come out on her own ...”

Before I could say everything, Fornoir came out from the Hermit's stable and sent Estia's body flying.

“Fornoir, calm down. Estia's body and Darkness Spirit's body is different right?”

I stroked her neck to soothe her and she was only slightly agitated but she did

not go violent.

“Fuu.”

It looked like the same thing would happen again if Estia’s consciousness returned now so I applied Heal and I could see the Darkness Spirit’s considerable exhaustion trying to stop Estia’s consciousness from returning.

The next instant, black light manifested and wrapped around Estia’s body, in response, Fornoir also wrapped herself in white light and they both stared at each other without moving.

I could only watch over the proceedings.

Without hearing any voices, I could surmise that a conversation between just the 2 of them was happening.

“You, thank you. Also, I entrust Estia’s body to you. I’ll appear again when my strength returns.”

After saying that, Estia fell towards me as if her strings were cut so I supported her and Fornoir also entered the Hermit’s stable.

“I can no longer understand what’s happening but what should I do?”

I didn’t want to gain unwanted suspicion so recalling that it was Granhart-san’s job to question her, with no other choice, I traveled towards Granhart’s room and decided to carry Estia to the guest rooms.

“I was able to predict that it would turn out like this but ... so terrible.”

It was as if the Darkness Spirit was plainly flaunting its power, I walked while waking up about 20 church officials sleeping along the corridor on the way to Granhart-san’s room.

“If this is the case, I can easily imagine that Granhart-san would have been also made to fall asleep ... no other choice, maybe I’ll bring her to Rosa-san’s place.”

When I reached the dining hall, they had finished cleaning up and I discovered Rosa-san and the others about to return so I entrusted Estia to her.

“Sorry. There would various problems if I took care of her so please help me guide her to the guest rooms.”

"If that's the case then leave her to me. Luciel-sama and others have a mock battle tomorrow as well so you can entrust her to me."

Rosa-san smiled as she carried Estia in a princess carry and walked away.

I saw Rosa-san off while looking at her reliable back.

"I'll invite her to the clothes shop next time to buy her clothes as a present."

I murmured as I was finally able to return to my own room this time.

A lot was going on in my head regarding Fornoir but I would not understand even if I thought about it so I threw in the towel and forcibly slept using the Angel's Pillow.

Chapter 130: Combat mental attitude

Thanks to sleeping in my own room after a long time as well as the effect of Angel's Pillow, I was able to have a proper good night's sleep.

Since the morning sun had not risen outside, I could tell that it was earlier than usual.

"I'm not sure if the reason why I woke up at the usual time I woke up in the past is because I slept here after such a long time or because of Fornoir."

Following my past habits, I did my morning stretches while thinking about the mock battle today.

Yesterday, because I have leveled up, my physical ability has significantly risen and compounded with the fact that I have not fought with the Valkyrie Paladin Corps for quite a while, I was able to defeat Elizabeth-san and Saran-san.

However, today I would be battling Catherine-san and Lumina-san who are both better than me in terms of level, physical ability, and technique, so I must think of some means to compete with them.

I'll slowly think about Fornoir and Estia later.

There's also the fact that Fornoir didn't talk to me but there's no rush since it seemed like the Darkness Spirit does properly care about Estia.

"I'll leave it up to Fornoir if she wants to return to the stable so maybe I'll have a talk with Fornoir."

I stopped doing my stretches and went to show myself at the Valkyrie Paladin Corps training ground.

The sun gradually began to rise and Catherine-san was there at the training ground when it became bright.

"Catherine-san, good morning. You're early."

"Luciel-kun, morning. There's a mock battle today but I was so happy that I would be able to have a mock battle with General Lionel that I ..."

Looking at Catherine-san totally show a maiden's expression, I thought to myself that Lionel sure is popular.

"Lionel is formidable you know."

"I'm burning up. Since there's no danger to life, my blood is boiling with the thought that I can fight seriously. If you're up for it, do you want to have a light spar?"

It seemed like Catherine-san was just starved of battles.

The church is also like that but it might be this world's logic that strong people equal combat maniacs.

"Fine but please hold back."

"I know, it's fine to use whatever weapon we specialize in."

"... Your weapon might end up breaking though?"

"I fight with that assumption so it's not a problem."

"Is that so? ... Here I come then."

To give the confident Catherine-san a little surprise, I approached her in an instant while replying and swung my illusionary sword.

"You're quite fast. But that's all to it."

Even though I filled the distance in an instant using Body Strengthening that I did not use yesterday, she was able to avoid the illusionary sword with a paper thin margin.

"I'll keep on coming."

I took out the Holy Dragon Spear and shifted my brain to use my dual sword-spear technique after a long time as I continued to unleash my one hit one kill technique.

Being able to strike out with my offhand Holy Dragon Spear without wavering, my combat style was also changing little by little.

"That's some amazing growth. Now, it might be tough for everyone other than Lumina to fight with you one-on-one."

“You saying that makes me happy but I still totally can’t catch you at all ... as expected, you’re strong.”

“Of course. But all of the retainers that Luciel-kun brought are capable of this extent right?”

” ... If you’re talking about being able to treat me like a child in combat, yeah that’s right.”

She had most likely already grasped the majority of my ability yesterday.

There’s no doubt that this person is also a combat maniac after all.

“Is there nobody in the church who can fight with Catherine-san squarely?”

” ... There was a great number of them in the past. Hence there were many that I could aim towards. However, now I have to hold back when fighting so I’m truly grateful that you brought along strong people.”

While staring at Catherine-san’s expression that changed from a nostalgic expression to a lonely expression and then to a truly delighted one, I resumed my attacks.

“Even though I wish to win against Catherine-san a couple of years later, I’ll create a squad that you can’t win against so please wait for it.”

“Not aiming to win by yourself huh?”

“Because I’m a Healer.”

When I stabbed with the Holy Dragon Spear in my left hand, Catherine-san countered towards my chest as I showed the side of my body due to the thrust ... I was directly sent flying with a Kenka Kick. (TL: Kenka kick/Yakuza kick is a pro-wrestling move) “Gahh”

When I somehow adjusted my poster after I was sent flying, the tip of a sword stopped right before my neck.

” ... I surrender.”

“It was a fairly sharp attack but, perhaps due to your shallow combat experience or because you think that you can heal yourself with healing magic whenever you want? there were plenty of openings.”

I was startled when I heard that.

Because I was certainly thinking that I could heal myself when in battle.

I wonder when did I start using such a fighting style?

“Will it become hopeless if I continue like this?”

“This fighting style is fine if Luciel-kun has retainers that can constantly defend you but even so, by committing to a 7-to-3 ratio of attacking and defending, you would suffer from unnecessary injuries when fighting against opponents that you can win against comfortably.”

” ... Could I request for another match?”

“Of course.”

Catherine-san gave a soft smile and readied herself.

After I was thrown down about another 10 times, before I knew it, I noticed that everyone from the Valkyrie Paladin Corps was watching our early morning training when I stood up when it was about time for breakfast.

“You did well to not get your mind broken.”

“As expected of the greatest combat maniac among the Healers.”

“It’s amazing that you can take that much.”

While feeling that it was nostalgic to hear such voices, we all traveled together to the dining hall.

At the dining hall entrance, Lionel and the others, as well as Estia, were waiting for me.

“Morning everyone. Did you all get a good sleep in the church guest rooms?”

When I called out to the 4 of them, Lionel and Cathy looked like they had good sleep but Kefin’s expression stiffened slightly.

“I won’t say that it was comfortable but I could sleep properly.”

“I slept well nya.”

“I couldn’t really sleep. I still can’t calm down when lying on a soft bed.”

Since Ienith, Kefin has never been good at sleeping on a soft bed.

“Kefin, it’s about time you get used to it. If you can’t get sleep on beds from this point on, you won’t be able to recover from your fatigue.”

“Sorry, please consider that I’ve been sleeping on the floor until just recently.”

” ... We’ll gradually convert your bed from a stiff bed to a soft bed.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t worry about it. Estia, are you alright now?”

Ending my conversation with Kefin, I spoke to Estia who was looking downward.

The conversation was flowing naturally up to this point.

“Erm, good morning. About last night’s incident ...”

“We’ll talk about that incident later but is there a hearing today as well?”

“Yes. It seems like I will be assigned as a subordinate under the direct supervision of Luciel-sama after the hearing is over so please take care of me.”

“Ha? Who told you that?”

“Granhart-san.”

Granhart-san doesn’t have such authority so was it enticement by the Darkness Spirit? When I thought up to that point, I heard a voice from behind me.

“Luciel-kun, that was decided by Pope-sama. The fact that Spirit Magic Swordsman is a rare job was also taken into consideration but above all else, since Sir Rainstar was a Spirit-user, Pope-sama judged that she might be a helpful existence to Luciel-kun in the future.”

Catherine-san thrust those words onto me.

Even though Pope-sama is a half-elf, she is the child of ridiculous people like Sir Rainstar. Since Sir Rainstar was a Spirit-user, there is sufficient or more than sufficient possibility that Pope-sama is capable of contacting Spirits herself.

” ... Let’s have breakfast for now.”

I puzzled over those words and entered the dining hall.

“Rosa-san, thank you for last night.”

“Don’t mention it. Since Luciel-sama most likely don’t know where the guest rooms are.”

“Next time, I plan to go buy clothes for my retinue so please accompany me again when that time comes.”

“But I think it would be alright if I don’t go with you if you are fine with Anna’s shop?”

I tried asking her proactively since Rosa-san would try to decline from beginning to end.

I had already confirmed 3 years ago that the members behind me don’t have dress sense. (TL: He’s referring to the Valkyrie Paladin Corps girls xD) “It also doubles as thanks for last night. Please.”

“!? O, okay so please raise your head.”

Rosa-san anxiously asked me to raise my head when I bowed and glancing up, I saw that she agreed.

“Then I’ll let you know when I plan to go.”

“I understand but I’ll be troubled if you lower your head.”

“I’ll be careful. Well then, a large serving please.”

” ... I somehow feel tired. Please wait a moment.”

When I requested for food with a smile, Rosa-san headed towards the back with a sigh.

“Luciel-kun, you’re interested in clothes?”

The quiet Lumina-san was the one who asked.

“Just as much as everyone else. There’s a possibility that I need them for when I visit other countries in the future and I also have engineer retainers who can enchant them.”

” ... By the way, does Luciel-kun know about the Principality of Blange?”

“Yeah. It’s the country to the eastern side of lenith right? What about it?”

"... It's fine only if you get the chance to travel there but could you help me investigate the country's situation when you do?"

"... Understood. If I get the chance to go there, I'll try investigating."

I could tell that Lumina-san was acting differently from usual but I agreed without asking for the reason.

At that time, Rosa-san came at the right timing carrying food so I thanked her and head for the seats.

We spent our meal merrily as we talked about the mock battle today and Lumina-san who looked gloomy until just earlier also looked like she was enjoying herself.

While feeling slightly uneasy, we sent Estia to Granhart-san's place and stepped foot into the training ground.

Chapter 131: Empire, Demon race, Human rights

After arriving at the Valkyrie Paladin Corps' training ground, we were stopped when we were about to immediately begin loosening our bodies.

"Luciel-kun, the mock battle today will be held at the large training ground ahead."

The instant Catherine-san grinned and pointed at the large training ground, I got a bad feeling about it and immediately asked.

"... I feel that this location would be sufficient with our numbers here? Or must it be done there?"

"A mock battle with these numbers would certainly be useful for you. However, I believe that gaining the experience of leading on a larger scale would be to Luciel-kun's advantage in the future."

"I've not commanded such a scale before though?"

Even the combat in Ienith and the Dwarf Kingdom were horrible experiences.

Commanding a small number of people is my limit and even if I get Lionel to command them, I totally do not feel any appeal to this mock battle.

Instead, I'm getting assaulted by nothing but bad feelings about it?

As I was thinking about that, Catherine-san began talking about the truth.

"So you won't do it after all ... yesterday, I don't know how they got wind of it but the other Paladin Corps and Priest Knight Corps asked me, saying that they also want to practice with Former General Lionel if there's no danger to their lives."

"Since you said that they asked you, please don't accept their request. I understand if it is a battle against a small number of people but fighting the entire Knight brigade is impossible."

While feeling surprised at Catherine-san who quite easily admitted it, I thought

to myself that I would never have a chance to command such a scale of combat in my life but I don't feel the need to command such a scale of combat in the first place.

"... You refuse no matter what?"

"I'm sorry, even if you stare at me with those eyes, I refuse. I've said it yesterday but Lionel is my retainer. Please stop identifying him as a slave."

The Valkyrie Paladin Corps and Catherine-san changed to a look of surprise at my unusually firm tone.

"Taking Catherine-san's feelings fully into consideration, the best concession would be to have round-robin battles. I believe Lionel and others have leadership and actual ability parallel to Catherine-san so I believe they will raise the standard of the entire squad. So if everyone from the Valkyrie Paladin Corps is agreeable, let's head to the large training ground."

"All right. I originally wanted Luciel-kun to experience Lionel-dono's commanding but it was somewhat too abrupt ... it's certainly my bad."

It would have been fine if she just said that I won't have to take up command if she didn't intend for me to take up command in the first place.

While doing a mental tsukkomi toward Catherine-san, I asked about the sudden decision to train my commanding ability as I was wondering about it.

"Why are you trying to make me command a group the scale of the knight brigade? Does it appear that the Empire is going to attack?"

I would be able to tell from the anxious atmosphere if there was to be a war.

Since Catherine-san has not returned to actual combat duty, it might be a blank worry, the forces were split into 2 so I could infer that it would be a battle between Catherine and Lionel.

"Of course, we are cautious towards the Empire but the ones we are the most vigilant towards is the demon race. Moreover, Luciel-kun. This is also for your sake."

I can't comment since I've never actually encountered the demon race before but they do give the feeling of being more troublesome than the Empire.

However, the revival of the Demon Lord should only happen 40 years later.

More importantly, the future where I have to take up command of forces ... is it a problem if I can't imagine such a future?

"I can understand why I should accumulate experience by fighting with a lot of people if there's a possibility of fighting with the demon race but why is there a need for me to learn leadership?"

"So that Luciel-kun can become the hope of the people."

"The hope of the people?"

... I'm not aware of the fact that I've become the hope of the people though?
Ah, perhaps it's because I constructed a school?

Or perhaps it's because I have Healing magic, that earned me the nickname Deviant Saint, that can solidify our foundation?

I waited for Catherine-san's words.

"Yeah. Because it's thought that with Luciel-kun's healing magic and barrier magic, people won't die. Morale would be high if an ever victorious army is made by making full use of Luciel-kun's those 2 magic."

"If that's the case then I don't have to lead either, it would be fine if I am just a part of that army."

Even if I don't lead that ever victorious army, I would even consider running away so that I won't need to enter the army as a healer so I'd rather not lead a squad.

"Normally that would be fine. But, it is different if viewed from the viewpoint of those who do not fight. The weak seek for those with charisma. They call for a hero (yuusha) if it's a Demon lord, a hero (eiyu) if it's a wicked enemy. Luciel-kun has already obtained the title of hero (eiyu)."

"Are you perhaps referring to the title ... S-rank healer?"

"That's right. By reviewing the price system as an ally of the people, becoming the first human representative in Ienith and the dragon slayer title raised quite a commotion too."

Nothing good has come from becoming the S-rank healer ... that's not the case so I can't really lament it but if Pope-sama is involved in this, why do I feel a slight tinge?

Leaving that aside, why do the residents know about the dragon slaying and lenith representative?

"Why do they know about my dragon slaying and lenith representative position?"

"It's famous within the Healer's Guild that Luciel-kun received Pope-sama's permission and killed a dragon. Well, that story circulated around the Adventurer's Guild for one point in time so it was widespread from the start."

I wonder where exactly does my peace and quiet lie?

"... I already want to be sent to live in seclusion."

"Fufufu. Do you seriously think that you can do that?"

Despite Catherine-san's way of saying it with a bewitching smile, I was shocked as I stared at her and squeezed out my voice.

"Is it impossible?"

"It's impossible until the threat of the Demon Lord is gone. Even if you were to hide somewhere, you will immediately be searched for and taken to train at the Church Headquarters if you were found."

"Do I not have human rights?"

"You do. Despite saying it one way or the other, you've released the seal on the Fire Dragon and the Earth Dragon right? I saw a delighted expression on Pope-sama after such a long time. Thank you, Luciel-kun."

"... Those were all due to the course of events though? Furthermore, that doesn't answer my question."

"As long as you face off against your destiny, your human rights is protected. I hope that you become like Sir Rainstar who overcame all odds despite being at the mercy of countless things. Well then, let's go."

My arm was grabbed and I was dragged to the large training ground, with all

the knight squads waiting in ranks.

Thus ... the curtains were raised for the days where I ... we, fought mock battles with the knight squads repeatedly.

Chapter 132: Revenge battle after 3 years

The mock battle with the knights was a bitter experience.

The mock battle between Lionel and Catherine-san was held first.

Lionel, having to use bladeless weapons, chose a greatsword and a large shield as usual and seemed like he intended to maintain a firm defence while aiming for a single blow.

Faithful to her position as the knight's Knight Captain, Catherine-san chose the orthodox one-handed sword and small shield and when her combat preparations were complete, their mock battle began.

... Speaking from the conclusion, the victory went towards Lionel.

Against Lionel's tough turtle-like defence, Catherine chose to make the best use of her speed to implement a hit-and-run style of combat.

If I was the opponent, the attacks would have exhausted me in an instant but it was a speed that Lionel could follow and the offensive power was something to the extent that he could shrug off.

In the beginning, it seemed as if Catherine-san was dominating the battle. However, Lionel measured the distance and timing and used his large shield instead of his greatsword to send Catherine-san flying, before immediately closing the distance and peppering her with follow up attacks with the flat side of his greatsword to conclude the match.

I rushed over when the combat concluded and applied 「Middle Heal」 to the 2 of them while asking them about their thoughts regarding the fight.

“Catherine-san, are you alright?”

“Yeah. The pain also immediately subsided.”

“How about Lionel?”

“No problems. Since most of the attacks were blocked using the large shield.”

Listening to Lionel's succinct answer, I recalled something but I decided to ask

about it later.

Because I felt that he's definitely thinking about something similar to me.

"Catherine-san, this is my retainer who I have confidence in."

"... Luciel-kun is seriously unfair."

"Unfair?"

"Former General Lionel, could you fight with all of my squad leaders?"

"If Luciel-sama so desires."

"You sure are loved."

"Yeah. Since I'm working towards Lionel and Cathy and Kefin becoming people who are like my comrades, companions and for us to be like a big family."

Those were words that somehow came out when Catherine-san commented on that but it made me realise how I fully trust and have confidence in Lionel and the others.

"So enviable."

Catherine-san looked somewhat lonely when she said that.

Lionel's strength silenced the whole large training ground but taking into consideration the balance of power between Catherine-san and Lionel, it was something that could be predicted.

Lionel who is a rival to Instructor Broad won't lose to Catherine-san who is both slower and hits lighter than Instructor Broad. The only way it could happen was if she overwhelmed him with numbers or by crafting strategies.

This time, since it was a one versus one mock battle, she most likely could only rely on strategies. However, the strategy itself was too naive and could not threaten Lionel.

Actually, Cathy can't impart powerful attacks but she emphasizes on speed and has established a perfect hit-and-run style.

Kefin takes his opponents by surprise and he continues to look for methods to absolutely win while catching them off guard so he has a wide range of tactics.

It's only me, with my fighting style of constantly healing while using barrier magic to raise defence, who doesn't have anything that surpasses others apart from my weapon.

Lionel's fight with the squad leader-class, Cathy's fight with the vice-squad leader-class and Kefin's fight with the squad member-class began.

Catherine-san acted as the referee,

"Just like how there's always a mountain higher ... the challenge would be how to establish a fighting style. Although it would be great if there's a method to prevent combat from happening in the first place."

"Everyone probably thinks about that too but the reality is that it won't happen, Luciel-kun."

I heard the voice from behind me and I saw Lumina-san when I turned back.

"Regarding the knights, they are most likely able to achieve a certain level of results when they fight in groups. However, ones who possess the ability to overcome unfavourable situations ... unfortunately, there are none in the Church Headquarters."

"That's right ... because to overcome someone who's strength is above a certain level, one either has to have absolute combat strength or inscrutable stratagems."

"That's true ... I hope that you do not feel bad about the words Catherine-sama said earlier."

"The words she said earlier? I didn't really feel bad in particular?"

" ... What Catherine-sama said about Luciel-kun's ability and charisma drawing people to you was all said with the church in mind."

"Don't worry, it didn't bother me at all. Either way, if we ever go to war with the demon race, I would be recruited to the battlefield. Since the number of casualties would decrease if there's healing magic. However, I get the feeling that Catherine-san seems anxious?"

" ... Catherine-sama who has returned to the knight corps is an excellent commander and the appropriate one in terms of individual skill and group

leadership. However, she's anxious to improve because she does not possess as much charisma as Luciel-kun and she can't use Holy attribute magic."

Judging by the flow, it ends up making me feel as if she's envious of my abilities.

In a world where I hope for a peaceful life without being bound by the hustle and bustle but end up using healing magic to save the people while at the mercy of fate and having combat strength to the extent of defeating dragons ... causing the attention of the populace to gather towards me.

That's something that I am very not thankful for.

It's steadily becoming a straitjacket that binds me firmly.

I wonder what would happen if I lose my abilities?

Now I'm filled with nothing but anxiety.

Maybe I should try to consult Lumina-san?

" ... I also have the experience of feeling envious towards the ability of others. To live my life peacefully while saving those in need. That's all I wish for so it's not like I hope for a war with the demon race or the Empire soldiers."

"That's the same for everyone. Even so, Luciel-kun, in the end, you still stayed behind. Becoming an S-rank healer at 18-years-old, achieving the feat of slaying a dragon at 20 years of age and becoming the representative of Ienith. It's the same for me as well but Catherine-sama admires Luciel-kun."

"You're exaggerating."

"That's not true. Because she got excited when we reached the topic on Luciel-kun last night. She said that you've really become stronger and more attractive."

The age of my popularity has arrived ... as if.

I could tell just from looking today, it felt to me that the girls looked at me with eyes like elder sisters watching over the growth of their younger brother.

I was happy but I was also unhappy, such a mixed bag of feelings was sprouting within me.

"Lumina-san won't be participating in the mock battles?"

“It’s been a long time since I last fought with Luciel-kun so I asked Catherine-sama for the chance.”

“I’m a healer so I’ll be using barrier magic and healing magic okay?”

“Of course. I’ll be fighting with the impression that Luciel-kun is a Rock Turtle with hard defence.”

“At the very least imagine me as a human ...”

I smiled wryly as I continued watching over the battles of my 3 retainers.

“How much difference is there between a squad captain and vice-squad captain?”

“It depends on the squad but ... to think that they would lose so one-sidedly.”

It’s most likely this that caused her to be speechless.

He allowed the attacks to continue for a minute, defeats them when exactly one minute is up and gives them advice.

Such a scene repeated itself and after 15 minutes, Lionel had finished defeating all the squad captains apart from Lumina-san.

“The church knight corps have completely lost their will to fight so what is next?”

“The battle would end if we go to the center but ...”

“Then let’s quickly get it over and done with. Anything more would be a waste of time. Lumina-san, once our battle is over, let’s have combat training with the Valkyrie Paladin Corps.”

“I’m delighted to hear those words.”

Thus when Lumina-san and I moved towards the center, the knight corps opened a space.

“Are you sure you want to go with that fighting style?”

Because I was using the same spear and sword dual sword spear technique I used yesterday.

Recalling about the same warning she gave me in the past, I smiled and replied.

“It’s because I have but a single style.”

“Is that so?”

Lumina-san was most likely not convinced but in order to show her my figure that has grown a little, I’ve decided to do my utmost best.

My heartbeat started pumping loudly in anticipation for the revenge battle after 3 years.

After the 3 of them including Lionel finished their battles, Lumina-san and I waited for Catherine-san’s signal to start and that time finally arrived.

“Begin!”

The instant I heard Catherine-san’s voice, I extended a 「Protect Barrier」 via 「No Chant」 while circulating magical power within my body and I shortened the distance as if propelled forward.

Lumina-san similarly bridged the distance but there was surprise shown on her face.

Towards Lumina-san who took an attacking stance faster than me, I threw my spear without hesitation.

“Ku”

She dodged the spear without difficulty but her posture was broken.

As I took out a shield from my magic bag and held it in my left hand, I slashed at Lumina-san with my one-handed sword but she blocked it with her shield.

“I was surprised, I didn’t think that the display of your fighting style was already part of your strategy.”

“That’s because in my case, if I don’t rely on some clever schemes, in the worst case scenario I would be dead in a split second. In terms of this mock battle, for the sake of my retainers, I must at least show the minimum amount of tenacity.”

“I see. However, this distance is within my striking range though?”

Just as the sight of Lumina-san lowering her posture with amazing vigour crosses my mind, she plunged towards me.

I swung my sword without hesitation.

A look of surprise floated on Lumina-san's face as she rolled away to avoid the attack.

"To think that you've become able to see even that ... what kind of training did you do?"

"Cathy is faster than Lumina-san while Kefin can move without showing any motion or interchange position with a log so I won't be easily taken down by combat that takes advantage of speed."

It happened when I laughed and was in the motion of swinging my sword. The next instant after I faintly heard the voice saying 「Accelerator Boost」, I had collapsed facing the sky.

"Ha?"

I totally could not understand.

It wasn't merely at the level of being faster than Cathy.

I was thrown down by Lumina-san before I even knew it.

It was my complete loss.

"That's my full power. Just like how Luciel-kun has grown, I have also grown."

I immediately stood up and drew near to Lumina-san.

"It was spoken softly but I heard it. What kind of magic is 「Accelerator Boost」?"

"?! ... I'll tell you about it when it's just the 2 of us so could you not ask about it now?"

Since Lumina-san showed a rare astonished expression and said so after thinking about it slightly, I agreed.

From that battle, I intuitively felt it.

The fact that Catherine-san is the Knight Captain hasn't changed but Lumina-san is the stronger one without a doubt.

If not, there wouldn't be the glint of combat maniac eyes the moment I looked back.

While having the feeling that ... for a couple of days from tomorrow onwards, Lionel and Cathy would want to have mock battles with Lumina-san, I swore to get my revenge too.

Although we're all church personnel, the morale of the knight corps recovered with the first victory and the training continued until the afternoon.

Chapter 133: Distortion within the Knight Corps

After the training that consisted of only mock battles ended, I thought that they would return to their respective duties in the afternoon.

However, some knight corps who didn't find that agreeable appeared ... or rather, the other 7 squad leaders from the knight corps excluding the Valkyrie Paladin Corps heard that they planned to have training in the afternoon as well and protested to Catherine-san.

I didn't concern myself with that and thanked Lionel and the others for their hard work.

“Everyone, great work. How was it?”

The very first person to answer my question was Lionel who was showing a stern expression.

“To have such terrible squads ... if I attacked during the time when I was still a general with the Empire ... this place would have likely already become a territory under the Elimasia Empire. The salvation now is that, due to Luciel-sama’s policy towards adjusting the healer fees, it largely led to the support from the adventurers and the people from the surrounding countries towards the Saint Schull Allied Nations, creating a situation where others can’t attack even if they could.”

Apparently, somehow I had unwittingly caused the Empire to resent me once again.

I shall definitely never go to the Empire.

It feels like I would totally get assassinated if I go there.

I firmly swore to myself.

“Certainly, I feel the same too nya. I believe that it was lucky that Lionel-sama didn’t propose to attack if there’s a large collection of people like Luciel-sama around but, without a secret weapon, the Holy Capital will fall into ruin nya.”

The analytical ability of the 2 of them was exceptionally high.

“I feel that the Priest Knights at Lenith were stronger than the knights here.”

Kefin announced.

Then, Lionel voiced out improvement measures.

“Unless each and every one of the knight corps has Holy attribute magic ... either by being able to use magic like Area Barrier and Middle Heal like Luciel-sama or have healers join and support them, they would not be able to win in battles.”

Lionel asserted as he looked distantly into the sky.

As the various squads rushed to the canteen in order, we announced that we would slowly have our meal last. Upon doing so, each and every one from the knight squads who suffered crushing defeat during the mock battles began to come to seek advice from Lionel and the others.

I thought that there were human supremacists among them as well but they approached Cathy and Kefin while holding a respectful attitude so they were not subjected to any kind of discrimination.

In the end, until the dining hall cleared out, I applied 「Area Barrier」 on the knights who requested for it to try out the effects as they told us that they would put in effort immediately while holding Lionel and the others' opinions as reference.

However, I avoided explaining to them the possibility of power leveling healers.

Because I could imagine them forcibly sending healers out to the battlefield and I believe it would highly likely produce a disastrous situation.

If the time comes that they can't use magic, in situations where they are fighting alone, if they can't even defeat weak monsters, the healers would have to bid farewell to their lives.

I'm incapable of making the decision of imposing such risks to the healers is the correct thing to do.

Wouldn't it somehow be alright if healers who use healing magic in adventurer parties are recruited? I did consider that but since there's a discrepancy in the

rise of stats, unlike in games, it may be fine at the beginning but as they advance to the latter half, they would be hard pressed when the healers can no longer support them.

I was once again made aware of this world's reality as I thought about this case.

After a while, for the sake of lunch, we headed to the dining hall and Catherine-san was waiting for us there.

Then, she told us that instead of a mock battle with the Valkyrie Paladin Corps for the planned afternoon training, it has been finalized that it would be changed to a combined exercise.

"Because of that, could I have you observe the combined exercise from above?"

Catherine-san directed that at Lionel instead of me. But, Lionel's gaze flowed towards me.

"Meaning you want his advice from watching the exercise?"

I asked squarely instead of Catherine-san's way of beating around the bushes.

In the past, when I was in the church headquarters, the combined exercise only happened thrice. To have this at this timing was most likely because they wanted Lionel to observe and to receive advice from him.

It's not like I don't understand the feelings of Catherine-san who climbed up to the ranks of knight captain at a young age.

It's probably natural to seek for advice from somebody who has higher leadership ability due to seniority and is even stronger as an individual when you're at a loss.

"There are conditions. Firstly, this time, we will not be participating in the exercise and will only be viewing from above. I'll gather the points that Lionel and the others noticed and give it to you after I make a summary of it."

"... Understood. Thank you."

After bowing, Catherine-san dashed out of the dining hall.

After Catherine-san had completely disappeared from the dining hall, Lionel spoke.

“Is it fine to not participate in the exercise?”

“I don’t really know why but I have a feeling that Catherine-san has a lack of self-confidence. If Lionel takes command of the exercise and Cathy and Kefin participate in the exercise, there’s a possibility that Catherine-san may speak of retiring.”

I’ve never seen Catherine-san trying to hang on like that.

It didn’t feel appropriate to ask around if anything happened to her during this one-year duration so I held my head and worried about it.

“... I don’t think that it’s something to that extent nya. However, trying to find a person to take command may be the right decision nya.”

“What do you mean?”

“The commanding officer grasps the overall picture. However, results and strong charisma are required to consolidate all the squads ... something like that?”

“Kefin seems to have also gotten it ...”

“Information gathering is Kefin’s forte nya.”

“... Does it mean that she is incapable of bringing together the whole knight corps?”

As it seemed to be an opinion derived from analysing the situation instead of beastmen intuition, while admiring the intelligence gathering ability of the 2 of them, I asked about it in detail.

“For example when Lionel-sama was the general leading the Empire’s army, he stood at the forefront as he gave out instructions to the respective squads and he personally stepped in when there was an unfavourable situation nya.”

Lionel eluding arrows and magic as he pushed forward on horseback with a spear and blew away all who approached him.

I could easily imagine such a scene.

“I have the same belief of not letting even a single soldier die like Luciel-sama, no, I feel that yours is even stronger than mine. Furthermore, with respect to commanding, since you have no problem leading a small number, depending on the training I believe you will be able to command larger groups.”

“You think I should take command of the church knight corps?”

When I asked the 3 of them, they gave ... unexpected replies.

“If you cannot completely refuse getting taken by the flow and given command, it will turn out like that.”

“The times when Luciel-sama had to think of an answer on your own and ended up getting caught up in it has already happened many times nya.”

“I honestly thought that you had grown when you chose to observe the combined exercise just now.”

My evaluation was low across the board.

“... I don't want to be tied up here and I want to quickly head to Meratoni.”

“If that's the case then we should leave here today after finishing our dinner.”

I understood that I also need to be able to make decisions like Lionel.

Even so, that wasn't my decision.

“... I'm thankful for the advice. However, I still have to thank Rosa-san and I think there's also a risk if we move immediately. That's why I decided to head to Meratoni a week later. Thankfully, I have not taken the horses out from the Hermit's stable so we'll probably be fine.”

“... That's when you should go immediately nya. Luciel-sama has a strong sense of duty in strange ways nya.”

“I'd say that's a good aspect of Luciel-sama though.”

“We're Luciel-sama's retainers so we'll follow your decision.”

Cathy smiled wryly, Kefin gave his affirmation while Lionel summed it up.

We once again set foot towards the large training ground as we had that conversation, sitting on the overlooking seats of the large training ground that Catherine-san guided me to in the past, we watched the combined exercise.

They were divided into Priest Knights and Paladins, with Catherine leading the Priest Knights and the youngest among all the squads, Lumina-san, commanding the Paladins as they clashed.

There were 4 squads each but combat strength-wise the Priest Knights required double the amount of people.

The battle between the Priest Knight Corps led by Catherine-san in a fan-shaped semi-circular formation and the Paladin Corps led by Lumina-san in an acute V-shape formation began.

“What do you think?”

“Normally, it would be advantageous towards the Priest Knights but, the Paladins have higher individual ability and I imagine the difference in commanders would come into play later.”

“I think so too nya ... Also, I understood one point nya. It seems that this time the drill relies on Luciel-sama’s healing magic nya. It was easy to understand with the exercise getting scheduled in a hurry nya.”

The words of Cathy continuing from Lionel felt like they pulled me back to reality.

“It’s just my intuition but the Paladin Corps will probably win. The difference in strength is to that extent.”

“Well even so the winner would be the Priest Knights led by Catherine-san ... otherwise, they would probably end with a draw.”

When I muttered that, the 3 of them showed astonished expressions and looked at me curiously.

“How could you tell nya?”

“Lumina-san’s admiration for Catherine-san is one point, the morale effect on the Knight Corps if Catherine-san losses is one point and I don’t feel any fighting spirit from the Paladin Corps side.”

The Knight Corps looked strained.

“Seems like you are watching properly.”

“If it’s commanding a squad of that extent, Luciel-sama would also be able to command them sufficiently well.”

“All 3 of you knew right? I can tell because I’m looking from above but if the location changed I’d most likely see it a different way.”

“That’s dependent on the experiences you have in the future.”

Lionel said with a smile but I can’t imagine myself capable of doing that.

Just as we had expected, the combined exercise between the Priest Knight Corps and the Paladin Corps ended with the victory of the Priest Knight Corps.

Chapter 134: Abnormal change to the Labyrinth of Tribulations

Similar to yesterday I spent the day with everyone until dinner but after dispersing I headed to the Labyrinth of Tribulations on my own.

While feeling relieved that I could use the card meant to operate the magic-driven elevator without issues, I advanced to the entrance of the labyrinth.

“I might find it slightly smelly inside the labyrinth ... very well, I’ll drink Object X and pump myself up before plunging in. My level has not been rising at all recently and I won’t necessarily be going anywhere later anyway.”

While grumbling slightly, I took out Object X and poured it into a jug and began drinking it for the first time after a long time.

The next instant, the taste felt as if it caused my consciousness to retreat far away and I somehow regained consciousness just as I dropped to one knee.

“ ... To think that my consciousness would fly away just because of the shitty bad taste ... I’ve certainly become quite weak.”

Muttering to myself, I passed by the shop and opened the door leading into the Labyrinth of Tribulations.

Just as I began threading the Labyrinth of Tribulations, I encountered a ghoul right away and I defeated it with 「Heal」 and picked up its magic stone. However, I realized a crucial point at that moment.

“Why did a ghoul appear on the first floor?”

That’s right, originally, it’s a monster that one would not encounter unless they pass through the 20th floor but now it suddenly came out.

“For it to be like this from the beginning, this is suspicious ... I can only pray that this is not something done by Estia.”

The monsters increased each time I descended to a lower floor. After defeating those monsters as I advanced, I finally arrived in front of the boss room on the

10th floor.

“So if there is a considerable amount of monsters inside, then it would most likely mean without a doubt that the labyrinth has become active once again.”

I opened the door to the boss room and traveled to the center of the room. Upon reaching the center of the room, the lights lit up and the monsters appeared.

“So the number is smaller compared to when I first visited here ... huh.”

Applying purification magic, I immediately ended the combat.

However, the memory of dying ... to be exact the memory of feeling like I was about to die came back to me.

“At that time, I entered here with the condition of not being able to use magic, I’m surprised I didn’t die. I somehow could defeat the boss but if I took even the slightest difference in movement or thinking, I would have already left this world.”

As I picked up the magic stones while vividly remembering the past, I felt relieved that the boss has not respawned and advanced forward.

“I don’t understand why the monsters that shouldn’t normally appear in the upper floors are being revived here. Since I did conquer the labyrinth normally, the labyrinth’s strength should have decreased. If that’s the case then why is it like this now?”

While unable to put my thoughts in order, I further descended into the labyrinth for now.

Swinging the illusionary cane filled with Holy attribute purification magic, the undead turned into magic stones without any suffering.

“I know that the labyrinth the Fire Dragon was in became active because the adventurers touched a trap magic stone. However, this location is off limits to anybody except for church personnel. Furthermore, it is difficult to conquer this labyrinth as long as a person does not have high mental resistance.”

If that’s the case, then the people who made this labyrinth active are people who infiltrated this labyrinth, have high mental resistance and have high combat

ability.

And with the current situation, the most suspicious individual would be Estia.

If she is being manipulated by the Darkness Spirit, what exactly is the aim of the Darkness Spirit ... dispelling the dramatic delusions that were floating in my head, I hastened my footsteps in the earlier floors of the labyrinth ... but my time was up before I could obtain any notable information.

“There a danger I might alert the criminal if I dive any further and if, by chance, Estia is the criminal ...”

The boss in the 30th floor boss room was also not present. Feeling relieved, I decided that it would be better to inform Pope-sama about the situation of the labyrinth becoming active and turned back.

The next morning, I visited Pope-sama’s personal room after breakfast.

“Thank you for clearing out the people.”

I gave my thanks while paying homage as a vassal.

“You don’t have to worry about it. I could not speak with Luciel much the other day. Moreover, for you to come visiting alone would mean that there’s probably something significant?”

As Pope-sama passed through the dividing cloth, I told her about the situation within the Labyrinth of Tribulations I saw yesterday as well as requested for her to investigate Estia’s case.

“Thank you. To be honest, there are signs of ... the Labyrinth of Tribulation becoming active.”

“Wha?! For the Labyrinth of Tribulations to become active ... do you have any clue as to why this is happening?”

From Pope-sama’s shocked reaction, I could tell that this report has not reached her ears.

If Pope-sama is unaware of the activation phenomenon, Pope-sama may not actually know much regarding the labyrinth.

I thought as I began explaining.

“Yesterday, I entered the Labyrinth of Tribulations and noticed that it may have become active ... just that, an example of a similar situation would be the Labyrinth of Astray in lenith with the Fire Dragon whereby the labyrinth became active after it was conquered.”

“What’s the reason for that case?”

“There’s a trap laid at the very end ... the trap is a large magic stone that, upon contact, it notifies the Evil God and the adventurers were found in an undead state.”

“Does that mean that Luciel speculates that ... somebody had entered the Labyrinth of Tribulations?”

“Yes. There’s a high chance that it would either be my exorcist successor who dived into the Labyrinth of Tribulations lately or Estia who I brought along.”

I was considering if it was alright for me to talk about it but I did consider that she might not be affected by the putrid odor if she was possessed by the Darkness Spirit and the wave of Darkness may have caused the activation.

However, that hypothesis immediately collapsed when Pope-sama gave her counterargument.

“That can’t happen. As long as she is a Spirit Magic Swordsman. If that’s the case, there’s a need to investigate Luciel’s successor.”

“Please wait a moment. Why is it that she can’t enter the Labyrinth of Tribulations if she is a Spirit Magic Swordsman?”

“That’s because I am a Spirit Summoner. Of course, I also hold the blessing from the Spirit King but I am not your fated person, instead, I carry the responsibility of selecting your fated person.”

It can’t be helped that I thought that Pope-sama was my wife candidate for an instant.

It’s a secret that my chest was pounding loudly.

It’s unknown if the pounding was due to shock from hearing the words from Pope-sama or from the Object X that I had been drinking since yesterday.

However, because just by looking at her appearance, she was at her early 20s,

extremely beautiful and my type so I ended up thinking like that but ...

While feeling astonished that Pope-sama was more like a mother-in-law existence, I felt a sense of discomfort knowing that Pope-sama held the final deciding right but I stopped my pounding heart and decided to listen to what I have to listen to now.

” ... Is the reason why Pope-sama hold the blessing of the Spirit King because of recognition from your predecessor?”

“That’s right. The Spirit King’s Blessing cannot be inherited if the person can’t use Spirits. I was truly surprised when I saw Spirit Knight appear in your jobs. Since it would be contrary to the intentions of the Spirit-samas if I hand you the Blessing of the Spirit King.”

So I would hold the Blessing of the Spirit King if I become a Spirit Knight huh?

To be honest, is it my ego for thinking that there’s no need for a blessing if there’s no way to use it?

“Is that why you postponed the promotion that time?”

“That’s right. Of course, it was also the truth that you would not be able to use Holy attribute magic when that happens. Since Spirit Knights can only use Spirit Magic.”

“I’d prefer to remain as I am now if that’s the case.”

My identity is my ability to never die.

If I could not use Healing Magic in this world, I don’t know how many times I would have died.

How would I even let go of such an ability?

“You’re still the same. Leaving that aside, shall we return to the main topic?”

“Yes.”

Pope-sama gave a gentle smile and began speaking, returning to the meat of the story.

“As I hold the Blessing of the Spirit King, I know the approximate location of those who hold the Blessing of Spirits. The accuracy even rises the nearer they

are.”

” ... Does that work even if Estia is possessed by the Darkness Spirit?”

“So you knew that Estia was possessed by the Darkness spirit. The reason why I called Estia to the church headquarters is because I wanted the Darkness Spirit to know that I am watching. That’s why it is pointless as I can track Estia when the Darkness Spirit possess her and use Darkness Spirit Magic.”

As expected, Pope-sama also knew about spirit possession.

However, just as I was about to feel relieved, I thought of the worst case scenario.

” ... Would you be able to tell if the Darkness Spirit uses temptation, induction and slavery?’

” ... I won’t be able to tell. That’s bad. There’s a need to immediately verify all staffs. Also, Estia must be taken into custody and Fornoir be brought here.”

Even though she could tell the whereabouts of the person holding the Blessing of the Spirits, she doesn’t know the location of the actual Spirit.

While making a new discovery, I released Fornoir on the spot.

“Fornoir is in the Hermit’s stable. Should I immediately bring her out here?”

“What!! Seriously? Please let me see Fornoir.”

Pope-sama who became like a child lost the grim feeling she had until then and showed an expression befitting of the word innocent.

When I turned the Hermit’s Key, Pope-sama called out into the stables.

“Fornoir!!”

Perhaps because she heard that voice, Fornoir immediately came out from the Hermit’s Stable.

Different from usual, Fornoir also approached Pope-sama happily and began licking her.

“It tickles. Fornoir, I missed you.”

Pope-sama began talking as she hugged Fornoir’s neck but even though it was

in a voice that I couldn't hear, it felt different from the communication light emitted by the Darkness Spirit and Fornoir a day ago.

For a while after that, Pope-sama and Fornoir continued to talk. Then, possibly after their conversation had ended, Pope-sama requested to take custody of Fornoir."

"Could I take care of Fornoir for a while?"

I did not even think of going against Pope-sama's words.

Since I felt that Fornoir also wished for it.

"It seems like Fornoir also wants that so I will visit again at a later date."

"Thank you. Also, I want you to head to where Estia is after the attendants enter. She is currently in Granhart's personal room."

Personal room meaning that torture room huh?

While having nothing but foreboding feelings, after leaving Pope-sama's personal room and telling the attendants that Fornoir is inside, I headed to Granhart's personal room.

Chapter 135: Once again into the Labyrinth of Trial

Arriving at Granhart-san's room, I knocked on the door.

However, as if they could not hear the sound of the knockings, there wasn't any reaction from the inside.

However, I did not call out to the people inside and merely waited in front of the door.

It was merely a gut feeling but a strange sense of tension was being transmitted to me as if asking me to patiently wait before entering.

After waiting for a short while, I once again knocked on the door and this time, I called out.

"It's Luciel. Granhart-san, or Estia, please come out."

Perhaps because they knew it was me after I knocked and called out, the room door opened the instant I felt the atmosphere transmitted from within change.

It was Estia who opened the door and inside, Granhart-san was pitched forward and face down on the table.

It seemed like he was asleep.

Looking at that situation, I questioned Estia.

"What happened here?"

"That man's tone was way too strict. I accidentally made him sleep."

It wasn't Estia herself, I didn't imagine that I would be speaking with the Darkness Spirit that possesses Estia right off the bat but I questioned the Darkness Spirit without hesitation as if it was nothing.

"Inform me why you, the Darkness Spirit, possessed Estia this early in the morning?"

"Because that man was persistently questioning Estia and focused on her

words whenever she stammered. That's not an inquiry but an interrogation to find a suspect."

Certainly, in addition to being stiff, Granhart-san's inquiry totally ends up as interrogations. He strangely takes on an authoritative attitude so it's not surprising that Estia got frightened.

"Is that why you made him sleep? It's just my guess but perhaps not much time has passed since today's interrogation begin right?"

"I have to take into account Estia's feelings of going through an interrogation within the same oppressive space since the day after arriving here. I wonder how many times did Estia think of breaking down this room."

Although I can't understand why Granhart-san does his inquiries in an interrogative manner but I guess it is reasonable for Estia to want to escape.

Wouldn't it be better for a female to do the inquiry for a female?

I thought up until that point and then abandoned the idea.

Since the inquiry itself would be in vain either way.

"Ha~. Oh well. Follow me then."

"Where to?"

The Darkness Spirit gave a curious expression ... actually, it's Estia's face but it gradually changed to a look of apprehension as she began staring at me.

"You'll know if you follow me. I'll say it beforehand, your sister is also at that place."

" ... You are strangely understanding. Perhaps you have fallen for ane-sama? Or have you fallen for Estia? Or perhaps ... surely you did not fall for me?" (TL: Ane-sama = respectful way of addressing an elder sister or a respected elder female character) I'll admit that I like Fornoir.

But, what's with after that? She's flying way off the rails.

Why's the spirit of Darkness such a pain?

Since I don't have the confidence in using indirect expressions, I took a deep breath and calmly replied.

“Considering the actions we’ve taken until now, have there been elements that showed that I have fallen for Estia or you?”

“There weren’t?”

” ... Please recognize that there are differences between the values of humans and that of spirits.”

Feeling mentally tired, I secretly felt envious of the sleeping Granhart-san as I left a note for him behind.

“Even if there would be another inquiry later, don’t worry as I won’t let it be done in an oppressive space. Now let’s hurry up and leave.”

“You are really considerate. Perhaps you’ve really fallen for me?”

While handing the noisy Darkness Spirit, we once again returned to Pope-sama’s personal room.

“Isn’t this gate-like door the door to the Pope’s room?”

” ... You’ve seen it before?”

“Yeah ... to me, as a spirit, it was a brief moment but there was a human that I could share and have fun with ... it reminds me of such fond memories.”

The Darkness Spirit possessing Estia laughed gently.

Maybe she had strong memories together with Sir Rainstar?

While having such thoughts, I stopped in front of Pope-sama’s personal room and called out after knocking on the door.

“It’s Luciel. I’ve brought Estia along.”

“Enter.”

When the door opened after the voice was transmitted from within, the female attendants left the personal room and we entered as if exchanging places.

There was a horse beside Pope-sama ... personally, I knew but for the female attendants who do not know about the circumstances, it must have been a surreal sight.

I was uneasy thinking about what the female attendants were feeling looking at Fornoir but I calmed myself down and gave my homage as a vassal. At that instant, Fornoir stepped in front of Pope-sama.

I judged that there was danger and wanted to stand in front of Pope-sama but she placed a hand on my shoulder and confronted Estia herself.

“It’s been a long time, Darkness-chan.”

“Ha~, the crybaby Fluna has seriously become a splendid Pope.”

Perhaps because she was possessing Estia, they were conversing regularly in the shared Galdardia language.

” ... So you 2 are normal acquaintances?”

“Of course. All spirits are acquainted with me. However, at that time, I didn’t have enough power so ...”

“Guys who pry into the past are disliked you know.”

“Bururu.”

That’s right ... that’s what I felt Fornoir was saying as well.

To be treated this poorly just for asking if they are acquaintances or not, I decided to only talk about the labyrinth.

“So? I take it that you wouldn’t purposely send Luciel all the way to where I was just to exchange greetings right?”

“I wasn’t lying when I said that I wanted to see Darkness-chan. I’d like you to listen to Luciel for the reason for calling you here.”

Even though she has a mystical voice, I ended up thinking that Pope-sama was somehow cute when she talks for a long time as I conveyed the matter on hand.

“Firstly, do you know of the labyrinth within the church?”

“A labyrinth in the church headquarters? ... I do sense fluctuations of Darkness from the facility that was used in the past though?”

Once the Darkness Spirit closed her eyes, she immediately sensed the Labyrinth of Tribulations.

“That’s right. It appeared slightly less than 50 years ago but thanks to Luciel clearing the labyrinth on his own a couple of years ago, we were able to perform the funeral for many of our brethrens.”

Pope-sama spoke of it happily and the Darkness Spirit looked towards me.

“It’s because luckily for me, only undead appear inside the labyrinth.”

The Darkness Spirit possessing Estia nodded when I said so and for some reason began to murmur.

” ... If that facility turned into a labyrinth, either demon-type or undead-type monsters would appear. If Luciel cleared it then it means it was only an undead-type labyrinth? ... Does that match?”

It looked like the spirit was deep in thought.

Or perhaps she was analyzing it via reports picked up by small particles of Darkness sprites?

While restraining myself from dwelling in delusions, I continued the conversation.

“As expected of a spirit but I also did dive into the labyrinth yesterday. At that time, I noticed that the labyrinth has once again become active. Do you have any idea why?”

“None. I can’t take such careless actions and involve Estia in danger.”

“Don’t you think in this situation it is plausible that a Darkness Spirit entered the labyrinth and caused the labyrinth to become active?”

“It’s true that the Darkness attribute is the magic used by the Demon Lord but it’s not as if it scatters miasma and such!!”

Instead of anger, it sounded more like the suppressed voice of a sorrowful cry from the heart.

” ... Even though I was not aware of that, I’m sorry for causing unpleasant feelings.”

“It’s fine. It’s been passed around among the human race like that since long ago so it doesn’t matter. Rainstar and Fluna’s mother ... Fluna were my only

allies."

Looking at her show the same gentle expression as before, I could surmise that Pope-sama's parents, Sir Rainstar and the High Elf lady, were very dear existences to the Darkness Spirit.

"Darkness-chan, have you manipulated people lately?"

"I've done it to remove memories of me and Estia as well as make people fall asleep but even if I want to toy with their spirit, the suitability of the host has been low so I've not been able to do so. Even if I can do so, I won't do anything that will cause Estia to suffer."

It's said that spirits don't lie but even if she did, Fornoir will definitely be able to see through it.

Taking that into consideration, my successor exorcist becomes more suspicious by far but even if it is a labyrinth that has lost its strength, is it something that can be cleared by a regular healer?

Then, it dawned on me.

"If that's the case, then my successor exorcist becomes suspect but I've thought of one other possibility."

"What is it?"

"There's a possibility that there might be an Empire spy within the church among the healers."

"... Luciel, what do you mean by that?"

"There was a man within Lenith who acted as a spy while being a slave dealer as a front for several years. If you think about it that way, it wouldn't be strange if there are spies from the Empire among the Knight Corps, Healers and staff. Well, the talk about the possibility is totally unfounded though..."

With multiple people guiding the way into the labyrinth and by equipping magic tools to counter the Wraiths, it won't be impossible to break through this labyrinth.

My thoughts ended up bringing me to such a conclusion.

“I will leave this matter to Catherine. Can I leave the labyrinth to you, Luciel?”

“I don’t want to go on my own but if it is Pope-sama’s order then I’ll do it.”

Unlike in the past, my equipment and level have increased so I can have an actual feel to the labyrinth.

If this was any other labyrinth, I would have rejected it without any thought but I have good compatibility with an undead labyrinth so I accepted it.

However, there was a single difference this time.

“I’ll go along too.”

The Darkness Spirit raised her hand.

“I can’t bring people unless the Mind Magic used by the Wraith is not effective on them. I’d prefer not to have the friendly fire.”

I expressed that after judging that there was no merit in going together with the Darkness Spirit.

“Such magic do not work on me. Naturally, even if I am not possessing Estia’s body, due to the influence of me dwelling within her, Estia herself cannot be controlled by others.”

If that’s the case, I’d like Lionel and the others to use that too but I remembered that I had to keep the fact that the labyrinth itself is within the church a secret.

I can’t talk about this matter but I wanted to explain it to them using a similar matter so I decided to request for a delay in time we set off.

“I’ll need to inform my retainers that I would be diving into a labyrinth so would it be fine if we carry out the plan after lunch?”

“I’ll leave everything up to you.”

“Yes!”

“It’s similar to Fluna’s request but I have memories in that building as well so leave it to me too.”

“You be careful too, Darkness-chan.”

While Estia's act of patting Pope-sama's head was an act of disrespect, I had no way of stopping it.

When we were having our lunch, I told Lionel and the others that Estia had nominally become my subordinate.

However, I didn't mention about the labyrinth and instead told them that I had purification ritual training as an S-rank healer.

While looking at the 3 of them happily begin making plans when I ordered them to thoroughly beat the Knight Corps into shape until I get back, I understood that they knew that it was a lie and they were playing along with it.

"Please return safely, I want to quickly have a rematch with Whirlwind."

"I'll work hard for the sake of the new armor nya."

"To not put Luciel-sama to shame, I will do my utmost best as well."

While feeling extremely thankful for their concern, I replied with a simple, "I'm grateful."

Since it felt like something warm would flow from the corner of my eye if I continued talking, I smiled as I rode the magic-driven elevator down to the labyrinth entrance.

From yesterday's experience, the problem would be the 40th floor and 50th floor boss rooms.

In addition to ... would it be better if I remain wary of the Darkness Spirit?

When the magic driven elevator opened, instead of the Darkness Spirit, Estia was waiting there.

"Are your preparations complete?"

"Yes. I'll be in your care, Luciel-sama."

"Hn? What about the Darkness Spirit?"

"She won't interfere unless it becomes dangerous but she told me to convey to you that she will completely cut off the miasma so do not worry."

Looking at her give a troubled smile, I wondered why do I feel a sense of guilt

budding even though I did not do anything wrong?

“Let’s go then.”

“Yes.”

Thus, we stepped foot into the Labyrinth of Tribulations.

Chapter 136: Growth

I went to the shop after getting off the magic-driven elevator but Catherine's successor wasn't there.

"I didn't ask if there was a replacement stationed here and who it was if a successor was chosen."

Since it didn't look like it was vandalized, I thought that it was irrelevant and opened the door to the labyrinth.

"There'll be an abnormal smell from this point forward. Would you like to borrow a nose plug?"

"I'll accept it then."

She didn't look like she planned to use it but Estia quietly received the nose plug.

"I'll pass you the Holy Silver sword and shield. We'll be advancing at a rapid pace so please keep up."

"Okay. I'll do my best."

Maybe Estia was feeling nervous but she didn't continue the conversation.

Conquering the labyrinth with that atmosphere would give me headaches so I decided to quickly finish up.

"That's a zombie. Have you seen it before?"

"I've seen it before in the Empire when I was young."

"... I see. Have you seen ghouls and the like as well?"

"The Empire was also researching on the undead. As far as I can recall, people with high magic aptitude become wraiths, low-level corpses become zombies or mummies while high-level corpses become ghouls and specter knights."

"I see. Please let me know if you recall anything else."

"Yes."

Is the different impression I'm getting from her compared to before because I found out that the Darkness Spirit was possessing Estia? Or is this the real Estia? I didn't really know myself.

From then on, our conversation stopped.

The stench became worse the further down we descended but our clearing speed was constant.

It only took us about 30 minutes to reach the 10th floor and we exited the boss room after 10 minutes.

Our respective battles ended almost immediately but it took time to gather the magic stones.

"I feel that the number of monsters has increased compared to yesterday. But, let's continue with this pace."

"Okay."

Estia would reply when I speak to her. However, she's in a state whereby she only talks the minimum required amount when it is regarding herself.

I thought that it was because she became my subordinate but thinking back until now, she only properly replied when spoken to.

I came to a conclusion that perhaps her personality is one that does not talk about meaningless things.

"If there's anything you want to say or think that there's something strange, please let me know. Since there may be matters that I cannot detect on my own but can find out with Estia or Darkness Spirit's help."

"Thank you."

At that moment, she gave a happy expression and I felt that her wariness dissolved.

Is Estia's personality due to her reliance on the Darkness Spirit? After then, we advanced through the labyrinth without any weird tension between us.

"Why are the wraiths appearing from the 20th floor onward? Is it possible that the labyrinth itself is powering up?"

“What appeared in the past?”

“Monsters like ghouls, mummies, ghosts, and skeleton knights. Wraiths should only appear after the 30th floor ... I have a bad feeling about this. I want to quickly purify this place but we’ll take a break for now at the 30th floor.”

” ... Understood.”

Just as mentioned by the Darkness Spirit, Estia could advance without being controlled at all even after receiving the wraith’s mind interference magic.

I decided to rest in the 30th-floor boss room where the wraith and specter knights appear.

“Are you not tired?”

“They’re mostly defeated by Luciel-sama so I don’t feel much signs of fatigue.”

Estia replied but she still looks languid to me.

If it gets too tiring, she’ll likely change with the Darkness Spirit but ... no signs of fatigue?

“You’ve been fighting too and we’ve been walking continuously so you should feel slightly tired right?”

“Only civilians would tire from that. My level is decent and I’ve not worked myself recently so ...”

Has she not accustomed herself to a comfy lifestyle? That remark was the same level as those by Kefin.

“For me perhaps it’s because my status has risen compared to the past? Or maybe thanks to my daily training? I’m surprised that I’m not struggling in battle. Estia, do you want to fight a little more?”

“I don’t mean it that way ... how much time did you take in the past to reach this point?”

With that question, I tried recalling my past labyrinth capture. If I remember correctly, it took me close to half a year to reach this point. Since I essentially spent a year and a half diving into this labyrinth.

” ... I believe I took a couple of months. Before coming to this labyrinth, I was

preparing myself in Meratoni and after coming to the church headquarters, I experienced real life threatening combat ... I was substantially weaker in the past compared to now."

I naturally broke into a smile thinking back to my nostalgic memories.

"You've really worked hard."

"It's slightly different from working hard. I was merely able to overcome the ordeal with the help of luck to overturn my foolhardiness."

I can't say that it's all thanks to luck but if Great Luck-sensei didn't trigger, I wouldn't be standing here now.

"Even so, you did put in effort right?"

"... I wonder?"

At that time I was desperately trying to survive so I didn't consider it as working hard.

I've been putting in effort to learn the minimum necessary skills but I wonder, after all these years since coming to this world, even if it's only slightly, have I grown as a person?

It felt like that question became a wedge that wrapped around my chest.

After resting, we entered the 31st floor and the undead rank rose once again.

Multiple large existences like the red-eyed specter knights and wraiths stalked the floor.

"I may not be able to aid you so if it gets dangerous, try to evade. Conversely, if you have room to spare, please protect me."

"Understood."

After replying, Estia walked towards a specter knight and easily defeated it.

While feeling astonished with Estia's combat ability, I told myself that I am myself and that there's no need to compare as I faced the monsters.

"It's amazing how you can behead the monsters without a magic sword. It's a feat that is impossible for me."

I swapped between Illusionary Sword and Illusionary Cane as I defeated monsters with purification magic and with a magic sword and advanced while retrieving the magic stones.

“Even monsters that are supposed to only appear after the 40th floor are beginning to appear. Since I don’t know what would appear ahead, let’s have our meal on the 40th floor and take a nap. We’ll clear the labyrinth at one go after our nap.”

” ... Understood.”

Without struggling in battle or falling into traps, we advanced until the 40th-floor boss room at the usual speed.

At that point, Estia asked a question herself for the first time.

“Luciel-sama, is it usually this easy to advance in labyrinths?”

“I think it’s normally impossible. You feel so now possibly because we’re advancing without getting lost. Having the map I drew the previous time I dived into this labyrinth plays a huge part. Furthermore, we have prepared measures for the monsters ... for example, measures such as those against losing combat capabilities by falling under the wraith’s mind interference might play a large part as well.”

“Now that you mentioned it, we’ve been advancing without getting lost at all ...”

I wonder what reason caused Estia to suddenly talk to me. It’s not a problem but it did bug me.

“Why did you ask?”

” ... Am I being useful?”

It’s the same words as before but I didn’t know why she has such a strong desire to be useful.

“I’ll be honest. I believe I certainly could reach this point on my own. However, since I’ve hardly used my magical power, I’m thankful.”

“That’s great.”

Estia gripped my hands and smiled happily but I didn't feel anything in particular from that.

"I'll be troubled if you loosen your guard now. I had the experience of spending half a year in this 40th-floor boss room previously. I look forward to Estia and Darkness Spirit's strength to not have a repeat of that."

While urging her to stay focused, I talked about my own experience and focused my mind on the battle with the boss.

"Half a year ... I'm surprised you survived."

"I thought I said it was because my luck was good?"

"So it was the truth ... I thought it was a joke or ..."

"My principle is to not say meaningless lies. Let's focus and enter."

"Yes."

I also felt that Estia was taking notice of me.

However, I could not ascertain as to which extent was her true feelings. But, aside from deciding to be a retainer or not, I felt like she wanted to not fear people.

Then, when the door to the 40th-floor boss room opened, standing there was ... the Specter Knight King.

" ... To think that we would meet again."

"Wha, what strong intimidation it's emitting, that's not a normal monster."

Even though it's just a Specter Knight King, the intimidation aura was close to that of Lionel.

I thought to myself that I was not wrong when I considered in my heart the previous Specter Knight King as my second instructor.

Looking at Estia, she was trembling a little.

"You can't fight when you're trembling right? Leave this guy to me and stay ready at the back."

"No way, to challenge such a monster alone ..."

“That’s why I’m challenging it. I’ll make it clear to myself here whether I’ve grown or not.”

Holy Dragon Spear on my left and Illusionary Sword on my right.

I now have equipment that is incomparable to the ones I had at that time.

Even just judging by level, my level has reached 3 digits so I should have become stronger.

Even so, my body was still about to cower in fear against the Specter Knight King’s intimidation.

It’s a worthy opponent that I now want to clash with headfirst.

“Church Headquarters S-rank healer Luciel, for the sake of gauging my own growth, I shall challenge master in battle.”

A single beat later, I challenged the Specter Knight King to battle.

Slipping past the greatsword that could make me believe that it could annihilate anything with a single hit, the second strike’s spear thrust appeared in front of my eyes.

The first attack pattern has 5 types and they have few variations.

After repelling that powerful spear strike, the greatsword came swinging back.

My body still firmly remembered the patterns.

Receiving it with my magical power-infused Holy Dragon Spear, I diverted it such that it doesn’t strike my body and aimed for the open neck while rotating my body.

The Specter Knight King defended that with its spear and made a gesture to counterattack with its greatsword.

However, the Illusionary Sword sliced through the Specter Knight King’s spear without any resistance and while maintaining its full speed, beheaded the Specter Knight King.

“Even though I was so happy that tears were about to come out when I finally won after battling for half a year, this time I won even before a minute was up.”

My body remembered the attack patterns.

I certainly recall the time when I went against the Specter Knight King.

Making my body remember by confronting an opponent that I would not be able to beat normally again and again ... beating into my head and body the feeling of wanting to survive and converting that into my driving force.

I felt like I understood why I was so desperate at that time, frantically racing forward to advance. That's definitely something that the Specter Knight King taught me.

I realized that I have created myself in a way that is more than what I needed.

"Luciel-sama, why did you confront such a monster headfirst? Or rather, so Luciel-sama has been going easy all this time. I didn't know that you were that strong."

The radiantly smiling Estia's words felt like she saw through the current me but I also replied with a smile.

"I merely won against the past me. Well then, let's have our meal."

While laughing at Estia who had a blank look, I once again experienced the feeling of being alive after a long time.

Chapter 137: Motive of the Darkness Spirit

After finishing our dinner, I applied purification magic on myself and Estia and instructed her to take a nap.

Estia obediently followed my instructions and laid down.

Since Estia had not shown any act of betraying me at all until now, my trust in her ... was still not there.

The reason why was because Estia only showed normal human expression when talking but during combat, she was always expressionless.

It was as if she doesn't have any feelings or maybe her usual feelings were actually all made up? It was because I felt that way.

"After our nap, we'll have a meal and then proceed with conquering the labyrinth. Do you have anything you want to ask?"

" ... Nothing in particular. Well then, I'll sleep over at that side."

While maintaining the smiling mask pasted on her face, Estia took her nap around the center of the room.

I napped while leaning my back against the wall beside the door leading to the 41st floor.

As one might expect, I don't have the nerves to use my Angel's Pillow to have a deep sleep in a defenseless state near a party that I do not trust.

Around the time I was beginning to doze off slightly.

Estia suddenly stood up and I felt her draw closer to me so I pretended to be asleep while being on guard.

"I know you are awake. Luciel."

The one who spoke was the Darkness Spirit who was gradually releasing her pressure.

" ... You've changed?"

"So you're awake after all. Estia just fell asleep so I possessed her."

Why did she possess her after Estia fell asleep this time?

It gave rise to more questions but I questioned her for the reason why she didn't possess Estia and show herself until now.

"And so? To go through the trouble of getting Estia to challenge the labyrinth and to possess her on this floor, what's your aim?"

"I only wanted Estia to understand that there are humans who are not driven away by hearing the words 'Darkness Spirit'. My aim is only that."

The Darkness Spirit gave a sad look.

From that expression, I felt that instead of the Darkness Spirit, Estia herself was being avoided.

"... Instead of rarely showing her feelings, it's more like she lacks feelings? Or perhaps there's an invisible wedge that controls her own feelings to the limit? Such that she always wears a mask on her face ... that's what I've felt this time?"

"... Greater than expected deductive ability. Estia's darkness is definitely more deeply rooted than what Luciel imagines."

After hearing my words, the Darkness Spirit's expression gradually changed from the sad look to an astonished one and now it was a smile.

However, until now I still don't know the Darkness Spirit's real intention.

Well, it didn't look like she'll obediently tell me anyway ...

Leaving that aside, I had a question.

"Well, that doesn't matter to me at the moment. Leaving that aside, for Spirit Magic Swordsman, are they able to form overlapping contracts with spirits holding other attributes? For example, even if there's no aptitude for the attribute?"

"It's possible. Well, of course, there's a trial but it's not like it's impossible."

If that's the case then Estia is capable of obtaining more strength than she has now.

If it wasn't a double-edged sword then I would have welcomed it with open arms but ...

“I see. Could I ask one more question?”

“Of course.”

“... I’m just curious but why did you go through the trouble of becoming a slave and moving to the Dwarf Kingdom?”

The Darkness Spirit’s calm expression hardened in an instant.

“... What do you mean?”

“Don’t play dumb. With a constitution to not fall into status abnormality, drinking poison or sleep pills won’t have any effect. Furthermore, in the event of an illegal slave contract, with you, the Darkness Spirit, around, the kidnapping itself won’t be able to happen in the first place.”

“... Even though you look like you’re bumbling around, you’re actually thinking shrewdly.”

“... Mind your own business. So?”

Although she’s completely treating me as an idiot, for now, I’ll just endure and ... give a single word of complaint to the words she said.

“... She was looking for a means to escape the Empire. I granted her wish. I can’t tell you the reason but that’s the truth. I swear that I will not oppose the church headquarters where Ane-sama and the Pope are, as well as Luciel.”

If that was a lie as well, I would lose all trust in spirits ... I felt that level of persuasiveness.

“Alright. I’ll trust you, the Darkness Spirit, on that ... I can’t give any sound advice but Estia doesn’t trust or rely on people right? No matter how hard it is to believe in people, only Estia herself can resolve the problem.”

“Are you saying to leave it be even if it’s painful?”

“Estia is not the only side laying the bridge when it comes to human relations. If you, the Darkness Spirit, interferes, won’t everyone forget about Estia like she was just an illusion?”

“... I wasn’t aware ... I understand.”

The Darkness Spirit nodded and walked back to the center where she was

sleeping previously.

“Was I slightly too conceited? Leaving that aside, I wonder what was the reason why Estia wanted to escape from the Empire?”

Since I won’t be able to know without asking her even if I think about it, for the time being, I slept while sitting ... but, because I always sleep with Angel’s Pillow, I could not fall asleep while in a sitting position.

” ...To think that it would have such an adverse effect.”

With no other choice, I decided to meditate but ended up thinking about things after we conquer the labyrinth and could not focus at all due to my idle thoughts.

By the time I realized, quite some time had passed and I sensed the indication that Estia had woken up so I opened my eyes.

“Have you had enough sleep?”

Perhaps because she did not expect any sound from me, Estia gave a reaction that seemed like a ‘ハツ’ sound effect would not be out of place, causing me to laugh out.

“Were you awake the whole time?”

“Yeah. I ended up thinking about things after we conquer the labyrinth so I couldn’t sleep.”

“Sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing? Shall we eat?”

“Thank you.”

I’ll try helping her by improving her passive attitude to everything little by little.

“Have some independence. I’ll leave the meal times to Estia. Whichever time you say you want to eat, I’ll follow that timing.”

“Eh?”

“I feel that Estia should have slightly more of your own feelings. I’m thinking that this might act as a trigger for that. Either way, we’ll be clearing the labyrinth in half a day so I’ll try testing Estia’s judgement.”

I gave a naggy look and decided to act meddlesome.

” ... Will we be having our meal in this room?”

“We can have it in the labyrinth passage as well. Of course, we can only have it leisurely in this room.”

” ... Is Luciel-sama feeling hungry?”

“Not really.”

“That’s great. If that’s the case, shall we have a simple meal before proceeding?”

“Alright.”

I don’t know if this approach will work but I want her to build the bridge in human relations on her own from scratch.

While having that thought, I took out a table and 2 chairs as well as bread, soup, and salad that would make up a light meal from my item bag and set them up.

“Is this alright?”

“That magic bag is amazing.”

“I can’t give this to you. It would be great if we find one somewhere someday.”

” ... I agree.”

I tried saying it in a slightly mean way to test her but her reaction was weak.

Or perhaps she just splendidly let it slide. While feeling slightly embarrassed at myself for doing that, I apologized in my heart for causing the resulting delicate atmosphere.

After we finished having our breakfast, we proceeded into the labyrinth.

“From here on out, I no longer have maps that show the shortest distance. However, the location of the traps are clearly listed so please be careful as to not get led into a trap.”

“Yes.”

I set off after Estia gave her reply.

Although it's a labyrinth, since I've walked through it once, I found the stairs without getting lost.

Although there are monsters that are at the level that can threaten us, contrary to my expectation, it was still slightly too early for them to appear so it was quite reassuring.

"It doesn't look like there will be a problem if this is the case."

"Yeah. In the past, I had to hug this barrel of Object X and run."

"Object X? That smelly thing? ... Why?"

"I was trapped for half a year so my food rations were reaching the end. Even if I wanted to turn back, I could not turn back so it was the only option I could think of when I thought of the shortest method to escape. It was a method that didn't involve fighting but took the shortest time and the shortest route."

"... If that's what happened then you don't know what appears on this floor?"

"Yeah. Or do you want to carry Object X and walk?"

"... It's alright. Let's hurry ahead."

She weighed the strength of the enemies against Object X in an instant.

She definitely did, since I noticed Estia's right eyebrow twitch the moment I mentioned Object X.

I don't know if it's fine for me to observe her so well but for some reason, I thought that I'd like (her?) to enjoy living. (TL: It's ambiguous if the author meant that Luciel himself wanted to enjoy living or Luciel wanted Estia to enjoy living.) We arrived at the 50th floor without any incidents as we talked but when we advanced further, a mass of monsters appeared before our eyes.

"... Can we win against that? Or wouldn't it be better if we detoured around them?"

What appeared in front of our eyes was a mass of Specter Knight Kings, Wights, and King Wraiths.

"Put on your nasal plug."

I pulled out Object X without hesitation and opened the lid.

“It stinks and makes me feel nauseous.”

Estia received damage because she hesitated to put on the nasal plug but as a result, the swarm of monsters dispersed.

“Hurry up and put on your nasal plug. We’ll advance this way.”

I hugged the barrel of Object X and began walking.

“But Luciel-sama is capable of defeating the crowd of monsters just now right?”

Estia, who was holding her nose, asked about my actions but I taught her about the reality.

“It’s impossible. The Specter Knight Kings are especially impossible. We’ll be avoiding combat. If you hate wearing the nose plug then let’s quickly clear the labyrinth.”

Under my instructions, Estia advanced while staying in front of me and we advanced through the labyrinth.

She might have a reason why she doesn’t use the nasal plug even though I passed her one but there shouldn’t be a problem since I used purification magic.

Furthermore, I took into consideration that it was for a girl so while it is a nose plug after all, it’s shaped like a nose mask so it doesn’t look as if it’s there when the person is wearing it.

In a way, I also did not clearly state my reason for avoiding the battle.

Remembering the dreadfulness of the Specter Knight King when I applied Extra Heal on it caused my body to tremble. (TL: Reference to Ch33) Even though I know that the Red Dragon is stronger and has more presence than the Specter Knight King, no matter how strong I become in this world, I swore to myself that I will only never apply healing magic on the Specter Knight King.

Given that I don’t know if it would be defeated even if I deployed 「Sanctuary Circle」 just now, I chose the option to not fight since it could be resolved without fighting.

The 2 of us arrived at the end of the labyrinth, the 50th-floor boss room, while in silence.

I told Estia to prepare to plunge into the boss room as I shut the barrel of Object X but since she looked like she was feeling way too unwell, I applied purification magic and 「Recover」 and observed her condition.

” ... Will that monsters swarm return if we wait here?”

“Yeah. The undead fancy the living after all. I’ll follow Estia’s timing to step into the boss room.”

After I said that, Estia took a few deep breaths, looked at my direction, nodded and replied.

“Let’s go.”

“Okay.”

I applied 「Area Barrier」 on myself and Estia, pushed the door to the 50th-floor boss room and entered.

Chapter 138: Dignity of the Knight Corps

Three Healers, 3 Priest Knights and 1 Paladin.

We discovered a total of 7 people who were turned into undead.

“That’s more than I had expected. Are they still conscious?”

Even though they’ve been turned into undead, I was admiring the fact that they did not break their formation and voiced it out.

“If you, the S-rank healer, didn’t suddenly return, we would have been awarded a special promotion for being killed in duty ... Luciel-sama, curse you.”

Isn’t that completely unjustified resentment?

I thought that the representative who would speak to me would be the Paladin but instead, it was the exorcist who was my successor.

“You’re the healer who took over my role of exorcist ... are there others who are not happy with me as well? But I am surprised you guys could reach all the way here?”

“ ... It was expensive but we got our hands on a magic tool that could prevent abnormal states. Furthermore, we bought it in this Holy Capital too.”

I guess the guy talking happily is the leader?

While I continued to talk with them who had turned into undead, I began weaving my magic circle chant.

“I see. The fact that you guys have turned into undead means that it is alright for me to assume that you’ve met with the Evil God right?”

“You knew about it?!! Are you the Evil God’s henchmen?! How dare you ... this is?!”

“Sanctuary Circle. I’ll return your undead body to a normal one and hold a burial.”

I slowly activated 「Sanctuary Circle」 while I was talking.

“You coward. The final battle should be by crossing swords and winning. That

should be what the Knight Corps taught.”

The vitality of my successor exorcist and the 2 other healers gradually restored following the activation phase.

However, only the man dressed in Paladin armor retained his strength and consciousness from resentment.

I understand his words of wanting to fight fair and square but I wanted to welcome him as a human in the end.

That was the form of respect I follow. And I enlightened him, the Paladin, about the dignity he held.

“As an S-rank healer, if I do not stop you all who have turned into undead by any means possible, your consciousness would slowly thin and in the end, you would lose consciousness and hurt your compatriots, are you alright with being such an existence?”

For them who have turned into undead, what are they asking of me?

Even though I hold the title of S-rank Healer, are they hoping that I could defeat knights from the knight corps who hold overwhelming power?

Did the Healers want to exchange blows using magic?

Thinking up to that point, I naturally vented out.

“Either die as an undead or die as a human. Make your choice.”

While thinking that I didn’t sound like myself, I gave them their choices.

The healers returned to human and died while the Paladin and Priest Knights told me that they wanted to fight.

Cladding my whole body with magical power, holding the Holy Dragon Spear on my left and the Illusionary Sword on my right, the 1 versus 4 battle began.

Just in case, Estia acted as the referee and the safety net and I intended her to intervene if it became dangerous but I was confident that it won’t reach that stage.

“Then let’s begin!”

Without concern for the Knights who were beginning to release black mist

from their bodies, I approached at full force and slashed with my Illusionary Sword and pierced with my Holy Dragon Spear.

Without any tricks or feints, I tore through their shields and armor.

Because I knew that they no longer felt pain after becoming undead, I split their bodies in half.

It was precisely an instant kill and the situation ended one-sidedly.

“Are you satisfied?”

“To think that it would be so one-sided ...”

I knew that they were mortified but since they've turned into undead, their tears didn't flow.

“The dead ... once you become undead, your cognitive and physical abilities likely take an extreme dive. If you all were human, the one to be defeated would have been me.”

“Just like you've said ... as expected, you're not an S-rank Healer for show.”

The Paladin seemed to grasp that his own body was not responding and gave a slight nod.

” ... I didn't want to die.”

“So I'll disappear as an undead without being able to even return a blow huh?”

“Even though I became a Priest Knight after so much trouble ...”

The other Priest Knights were crying.

“From here, I will let you all pass away as humans. I pray that you all will be reborn as knights that will protect the church in your next life.”

I activated 「Sanctuary Circle」 and they disappeared after being wrapped in light.

After they disappeared, I retrieved the items that they left behind as usual.

“Let's return once we recover their magic stones and equipment. Do not touch that magic stone there no matter what. You'll be turned into an undead if you touch it.”

I warned Estia.

” ... Nevertheless, so we've cleared the labyrinth just like that. It's good that the final boss monsters at the end were weak.”

Estia did not identify those people as former humans or church personnel at all.

She only saw them as the enemy ... While feeling troubled in judging if it was because she was being pragmatic or that she's lacking common sense, I conveyed to her their impression on me.

” ... If they turned into Specter Knight King and Wight prototypes after dozens of years later, there would be no guarantee of winning. Moreover, I told them as well but if they had their living body then I can fully imagine the possibility of me losing.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. Since I am still weak.”

After we finished picking up the magic stones, a magic circle floated up in the center.

We confirmed that and cleared the labyrinth.

By the time I realized, we had returned to the first floor of the labyrinth.

“We've cleared the labyrinth with this. Let's head to Pope-sama's personal room.”

” ... You've finally cleared it huh.”

” ... Why did you switch at this timing.”

The Darkness Spirit replaced Estia.

“You did well noticing it. Estia is bad with places with a lot of people so I swapped places with her.”

“That's convenient ... perhaps it takes your all just to swap with her in a labyrinth?”

” ... That's not true. You've sure put a lot of thought into it.”

Looking at the anxious Darkness Spirit, I hypothesized that perhaps the magical power for spirits to manifest in labyrinths is not sufficient?

“Well, it doesn’t matter. Let’s go to Pope-sama’s personal room.”

“Okay.”

I’ve left Fornoir to Pope-sama’s care since yesterday but I wonder if she’s alright?

Such a thought floated into my head as I immediately walked towards Pope-sama’s personal room.

“Pope-sama, it’s Luciel. I’ve returned after clearing the labyrinth.”

“Enter.”

When I opened the door, the female attendants left at the same time.

While paying homage as a vassal, I began reporting about the labyrinth ... about the boss room at the deepest 50th floor.

“Good job the both of you. Let me hear about what happened.”

“The cause for this incident is due to the church personnel clearing the labyrinth after all. Like I’ve mentioned previously, I imagine they turned into undead after they touched the trapped large magic stone and caused the Evil God to appear.”

” ... To think that the Evil God truly exists ... If father was alive then we would somehow be able to deal with it but ...”

Pope-sama was lamenting but I couldn’t do anything about it.

Since I was also deep in thought.

Thinking if I could be like Sir Rainstar, as a Hero, as a Sage and as a Summoner, prepare some kind of measures.

I was regretting not talking with Sir Rainstar more at that time.

However, feeling that this wasn’t the place to talk about Sir Rainstar, I talked about my plans for the future.

“For the next several days, I will enter the labyrinth and confirm that the

labyrinth is gradually losing its strength. If it seems fine then I will follow my plan and head towards Meratoni.”

“Understood. I’ll be lonely being away from Fornoir but you’ll probably come back so I’ll endure it.”

That lonely expression gave rise to a question within me.

Has Pope-sama ever left this room?

It was enough for me to question that.

But I also knew that I still can’t decide on what to do.

“Moreover, I’ve confirmed with my eyes that Luciel possesses a spirit’s blessing this time. I’ll be able to check on your condition like this and we’re able to stay in contact with the magic communication bead as well.”

“Yes.”

I hope that Pope-sama doesn’t become something like a stalker.

“That’s all for my report. Darkness Spirit, do you have anything to say?”

“Fluna, Ane-sama and I have still not been able to save you. But we will definitely save you so please wait for us.”

“Thank you, I’ll be waiting.”

A seal? Or a curse? Or is there another reason?

What does she mean, saving Pope-sama?

I didn’t ask about it.

Fornoir was listening to this time’s report beside Pope-sama and after she licked Pope-sama once, she motioned a request for me to open the Hermit’s stable.

She entered the Hermit’s stable without any resistance even though she hated it so much in the past.

” ... Then, Pope-sama, I will excuse myself ... ah, Pope-sama, I have one wish.”

“What is it?”

“I wish to go to the Adventurer’s Guild tomorrow and heal for the charge of 1

silver coin?"

"Okay. Is it the Whimsical Day that Luciel set up?"

"Yes. It's been about a year but I wish to return to my foundations."

"I'll recognize it as a special case. Even so, as the party who established the guidelines, properly play your role and announce it as a demonstration for healing."

"Yes, Your Holiness. I will serve to the best of my ability."

"Umu. I pray that you will continue to do your best for the sake of the church."

"Yes!"

After we exited Pope-sama's room, several Knights were waiting for us to exit.

"What happened?

"There's a great number of people who immediately need treatment. Please quickly come to the large training ground."

There are other Healers as well right!

Suppressing my feeling to shout that, I ran towards the large training ground.

Chapter 139: Role of a Leader

If your companion asks for healing, you would probably do your best to help.

Then, if it is between the retainers of a big shot and your companion, which would you prioritize to treat first?

When I arrived at the large training ground, almost all of the members of the Knight Corps had collapsed on the ground.

I saw that Lionel and the others had not collapsed but they were on their knees.

“It looks like you guys are fine.”

When I approached while feeling relieved, I noticed that Catherine-san had collapsed in front of Lionel and Lumina-san had collapsed in front of Cathy and Kefin.

“Lionel! What’s the meaning of this?”

Lionel reacted and looked back to my voice and gave a relieved expression.

“Thank god. Luciel-sama, you’ve returned. You could please treat these people first?”

Lionel postponed explaining about the matter and urged me to treat both Catherine-san and Lumina-san who were covered in blood first.

Naturally, I would have treated them even if he didn’t say anything but looking closely, even Lionel and the others were quite beaten up as well.

“You all come into range as well, is just a 「Area High Heal」 enough?”

” ... Catherine-dono has multiple broken bones.”

I could infer that the equipment he borrowed wasn’t good enough so he couldn’t defeat her immediately.

If that wasn’t the case, I find it unlikely that Catherine-san would be able to cause Lionel who has great combat compatibility against her to be so beaten up.

” ... To be safe, I’ll use 「Extra Heal」 too. For Lionel and you guys too.”

Cathy and Kefin didn't say anything and I understood that they were in a condition where they could barely stand so after I applied 「Area High Heal」, I subsequently applied 「Extra Heal」 too.

“I don't know what happened but everyone has lost too much blood so rest for awhile. I'll be helping the Healers heal the Knight Corps members who you guys most likely sent flying. Incidentally, was there anyone who lost a body part?”

“Nothing like that happened.”

“We're not that weak nya.”

“There wasn't a need to do so.”

I could almost see the scorn the 3 of them had for the Knight Corps.

Even I have not been looked at with such eyes.

From the situation, I couldn't judge if it was because of just how far their skills have rusted or if they've been having easy training that can only look like they are playing around.

Indeed, half of the members of the Knight Corps have been sent flying and the Valkyrie Paladin Corps were not an exception.

“Is the reason why Lionel and the others are looking at them with scorn because of this weakness? Or because of their laid back attitude towards their job ... I'll definitely ask later.”

I continued treating them.

Including the Valkyrie Paladin Corps, they thanked me but none of them told me when I asked them about what happened.

After finishing all the healing, I returned to the center and Estia was greeting Lionel and the others.

“Were you introducing yourself?”

“Ah, Luciel-sama. Erm, why am I here? I should have been at the labyrinth up until earlier?”

While feeling irritated at her for saying the no-go word out of the blue, I decided to complain to the Darkness Spirit the next time she comes out.

“What labyrinth are you talking about? Leaving that aside, were you greeting Lionel and the others?”

“Ah, yes. I don’t know about the plan for the future but I did inform them about the plan for me to follow along to Meratoni as well.”

I let the talk about the labyrinth slide and continued the conversation.

” ... I see. Lionel, Cathy, Kefin. I apologize but this is a request from Pope-sama. Estia will be following us to Meratoni.”

“Well, I should be able to look forward to it more than the Knight Corps who pretend to be friendly with each other.”

“Estia is quite strong so we’ll be able to train properly nya.”

“She’s stronger than I am ... maybe, but in situations like these I have better situation assessment capabilities.”

They didn’t forget to show contempt for the Knight Corps. It’s rare for the 3 of them to show this much emotion.

“Most probably Estia is stronger than you nya, Kefin.”

“Now you’ve gone and said it.”

“You want to go nya?”

“No, I’ll get you back someday so remember this.”

“I’ll look forward to it nya.”

I smiled while remembering that the 2 of them have been hitting it off well lately but I can’t just observe Cathy and Kefin joke with each other all day so I called out to the 2 people who were still on the ground.

Since I’ve noticed that they’ve woken up since a while ago.

“Catherine-san, Lumina-san. My retainers have been discourteous. I don’t know why such a thing happened in the large training ground and why I happened to not be present but I apologize.”

” ... Was this matter under Luciel’s orders?”

Lumina-san was the first to reply.

Even so, orders?

“I didn’t give any orders in particular? Did something happen?”

” ... It’s fine if you don’t know about it.”

Lumina-san hung her head down and kept silent.

Even though I looked at Lionel and the others, they didn’t say anything.

However, thinking back to yesterday ... I have a feeling that quite some scolding is in order.

” ... If they did something, it would all be for my sake. Since the 3 of them are not people who would move for the sake of their own benefit ... While looking at yesterday’s combined drill, for a combined drill by the Church Headquarters in the Holy Capital, I was also made to think if the knights would actually be able to defend the church given such a lukewarm performance.”

While feeling surprised at my own astonishingly sharp tongue, the 2 of them also did not imagine such words from me and their bodies flinched.

Maybe having me say that was that shocking or that the same exact words were said by my 3 retainers as well, the 2 of them remained gloomy.

” ... Luciel-kun, wouldn’t it be better if you just led the Knight Corps instead?”

Just when I thought that the silent Catherine-san spoke, she really proposed for her to relinquish the captain seat of the Knight Corps.

Lumina-san was looking at Catherine-san with an unbelieving expression.

“Of course there’s no way I can do that. I have my own mission and the Paladins and Priest Knights were gathered as the church’s Knight Corps to protect the church right? Then who will protect Pope-sama?”

The 2 of them didn’t answer ... or to be precise, Lumina-san was peeking at Catherine-san’s reaction.

Individually, Lumina-san was already the stronger among the 2 and with regard to commanding ability, she has also become better than Catherine-san in leading.

For the Catherine-san who has lost herself, Lumina-san allowed her to win

even to the extent of holding back in hopes that she would regain her self-confidence?

However, that does not help anybody and only causes adverse effects.

I told Catherine-san the little take home I got from lenith.

“I believe that it is wrong to think that if a person is strong individually, he will not have the ability to lead a group. If a person doesn’t have leadership ability, then he can think of other ways to contribute while polishing his leadership ability. If not, he would not be able to have subordinates and retainers.”

” ... By any chance are those words pointed at me?”

I sensed intense anger.

Her feeling angry means that she’s mortified right?

If that’s the case, it means that she actually wants to remain as the Captain of the Knight Corps right?

I continued.

“It’s my opinion but if Catherine-san can’t be the Captain of the Knight Corps, it is fine to resign. Once that happens, the chain of command will become a mess and a rift will form between the Paladin Corps and Priest Knight Corps once again.”

“That won’t happen. It won’t change that Lumina and the other squad captains are at the top. This couple of years, at least once a month, we’ve been doing drills so the relationship is not as bad compared to the past.”

Catherine-san gave a sad expression but I’ve fallen into the same trap before.

For example, when I was in lenith, when the honey factory was discovered and in regards to the school as well, I thought that as long as the form was there, I won’t be needed to be on the top.

However, whenever I think back about it, Haniru from the Hacchi tribe’s words would float in my mind.

I was giving them strength because I was at the top.

I arbitrarily thought to myself that Catherine-san is definitely the same too.

Which is why, for Catherine-san and Lumina-san who have been helping me, I'll try to lend a hand so that they don't need to suffer anymore.

"Is that really so? As far as I can see, everyone from the Knight Corps is concerned about Catherine-san."

"What are you saying? General Lionel said the same thing too but what do you know from just a few days?"

Beside her astounded expression, there was a face giving me support.

I weaved my words with the help of the support from that expression.

"It's not just a few days, I'm saying from the stance of knowing about this church Knight Corps since the time it was revived. Lionel may know about it because he is knowledgeable about real battlefields but ... even if Catherine-san's individual combat ability is not the best, even if your leading ability is not the best, there is a reason why Catherine-san is the Captain of the Knight Corps."

"... What's that?"

"I can't put it into words well but if I must choose, it is popularity. As long as you are standing on top, it will be okay to just follow your instructions. You make it possible for them to think that way."

"That's not the case. Anyone can do it if they do it long enough. Even during the drill, didn't Lumina-chan lead the Paladin Corps well too?"

It sure is troublesome when elites get hurt.

She's completely stubborn on her opinion.

Originally, even in an elite organization, at least one person would always shine and possess the gravitational force to pull in the weed souls but ... I can't demand for something that is not there and ... it is a waste of time if it is useless even after I tell the truth.

"That's how it seems right. But in actual fact, they lost to the Priest Knight Corps led by Catherine-san right? That's your answer."

"... I can't understand what you are trying to say."

"The whole drill proceeded in a way such that Catherine-san would not lose."

“For what reason? Lumina, answer me.”

“That ...”

The scene where Catherine-san was outraged and Lumina-san cowered ended up happening.

Instead of a difference in rank, it's due to match fixing, or rather due to holding back, it was probably hard for Lumina-san to speak.

“It's because she wants Catherine-san to remain as the Captain of the Knight Corps. I also think that it is better if Catherine-san continues to take on the job of the Captain of the Knight Corps.”

” ... The Captain of the Knight Corps job?”

Her expression changed from a glaring look to a quizzical one.

“The job of organizing the 8 squad captains. To talk with each of the squad's squad captains and summarize them. You will be fulfilling your responsibility as the Captain of the Knight Corps just by doing that.”

When I was in Lenith, I only talked with the top management and my interaction with the employees were to the extent of greetings only.

Even so, it went along well because the captains and tribal chiefs that I gave orders brought together the people below them.

When I have thought up to that point, Lionel spoke.

“Indeed. After that, those respective squad captains just need to instruct their platoon leaders or squad members and the organization will be able to function. Not everything is your job.”

The things that Lionel has noticed should be more than what I have but he may once again be testing me here.

I ended up having such a thought.

“If it's during a drill, I think that it is Catherine's job to observe from above and correct anything you notice. Of course, nobody will feel troubled if you raise your individual combat ability as well.”

“Was I too eager?”

“Yes. Since you are one of the few who has the trust of Pope-sama, please pull yourself together.”

If the role of the Captain of the Knight Corps unexpectedly drops on me here, I’ll definitely be overworked to death.

Furthermore, since I ran away from the bloody battles in Ienith so that I won’t be involved and returned here, I’d like to spend my life with slightly more leeway.

” ... My role huh ... Lumina ... sorry. I may not be reliable but please support me.”

“Yes! Please continue to lead everyone as the Captain of the Knight Corps from now on as well.”

Smiles floated on both their faces.

It helped that Catherine-san was obedient.

Now that I think about it, Catherine-san may be an elite but she has descended from the role of Captain of the Knight Corps once in the past and she may have experienced plenty of setbacks before.

Perhaps I should actually thank her for not vacating the seat of the Captain of the Knight Corps this time.

“After having talks once more, I’ll rethink the method we hold the drill. Luciel-kun, this time, I’ve been helped by you once again.”

“I’m happy I could be of use but I only conveyed the feeling I got from watching that drill. Moreover, I’m sorry for saying such conceited words.”

“Luciel-kun’s feelings reached me perfectly.”

I felt relieved as the clouded expression she had until before was no longer there.

“I think Catherine-san can have slightly more confidence in yourself.”

” ... Thank you, Luciel-kun.”

Catherine-san walked closer to me with a smile and I felt a soft kiss on my cheek.

Without getting flustered, I thanked her with a smile.

“My pleasure.”

I’ve just drunk Object X so the effect has not kicked in yet.

In my previous life, I would never be able to be so calm.

“Ara, you weren’t shaken at all.”

“But I am delighted to be kissed by a beautiful person like Catherine-san.”

As if a person like me about the age of 40 after rounding up if including my previous life would be soaring over the sky over receiving a kiss on the cheek.

“Ooo~ Lumina, come here.”

“Yes. What is it?”

“Could you perhaps give Luciel-kun a thank you kiss? Since it didn’t look like he’s amazed when I was the one doing it.”

Why did she compel her to express her gratitude?

Furthermore, that shouldn’t be something you order someone to do.

“No, there’s no way she can do such a thing even if you tell her to. Right? Lumi... ?!”

“This is to thank you for your help this time, it’s definitely not because Catherine-sama told me to ...”

Lumina-san with her faintly dyed cheek was extremely cute.

The sweet smell that tickled my nasal cavity and the sensation that her lips left behind caused butterflies in my stomach for the first time since I came to this world.

If this was a honey trap, I’ve definitely fallen for it.

While having such thoughts, I lowered my head and thanked her.

“Thank you very much. Gochisousamadesu.” (TL: Gochisousamadesu = Something Japanese say after a meal, roughly translating to: Thank you for the wonderful meal/feast.) All the members of the Knight Corps witnessed this and I was laughed at from the shadows for the next couple of days.

Especially how the Valkyrie Paladin Corps excluding Lumina-san took it as their

material to tease me with and how it should have been where Lionel and the others came to my aid but instead hopped on to the evil practices, these would all be a talk for another day.

Chapter 140: Visible position

I was fed up of being teased in the church headquarters so I retreated to the Adventurer's Guild. Then, I sighed in the canteen.

"Ha~"

"So depressing. What happened? For Deviant Saint-sama to sigh like that?"

I told the Adventurer's Guild guildmaster Granz-san about this time's incident.

"Has Guildmaster Granz been suddenly kissed before?"

I looked back to the sound of dishes crashing and breaking and saw the Adventurer's Guild vice-guildmaster Milty.

Having her cheeks dyed red from receiving my gaze, she retrieved the broken dishes in an instant and disappeared into the kitchen.

"Was I misunderstood? Or, is Milty-san currently married?"

"... Well, just leave how Milty is aside."

It seems like various things happened here.

"... So, what are you troubled by?"

"It's just something recent but a girl kissed me as a form of gratitude ... I wasn't particularly conscious about it but the surrounding people arbitrarily made a commotion about it."

Granz-san lightly took out a cup of warm tea.

I brought that to my lips as I began talking about this time's incident.

"Hou. So Luciel-dono is thick-headed huh ... well, if the other party's identity is alright then isn't it fine? Since it was strange that nothing happened until now."

Granz-san patted my shoulder as he said that with a smile.

"Thick-headed ... even now I'm not really conscious about it but is that really the case ... ?"

In the first place, I don't have any intention of being thick-headed? Or rather,

I've been seriously thinking about how to survive and just have not had the leeway to think about anything else.

Taking that into consideration, who would fall in love with me?

There's no way such a thing would happen.

I've not done anything that would make people like me ... I think.

"Do you not like the person who kissed you?"

I totally forgot that I was in a conversation.

Lumina-san ... she's a beauty, has a dignified atmosphere and her smile is extremely attractive.

However, if I'm asked if I have any feeling of love towards her then I think the answer is no.

"No, I like her. But rather than liking her as a woman, my recognition of her as a person worthy of respect is stronger. I'm thinking if that would cause my feelings to soar from receiving her kiss of gratitude ..."

That's surely my real feelings.

"It sure is youthful to be troubled by feelings of love. If you can't decide on whether you like her or not then isn't it fine to just remain as per usual for now? Why are you so troubled over it?"

" ... Well, it's complicated."

Others would think that I'm running away if I immediately go to Meratoni but the surrounding people will make a fuss if I go talk to Lumina-san.

Are they adolescent children to make a fuss about a gratitude kiss! I wanted to shout that but as expected, it was bad to receive a gratitude kiss in front of almost all the members of the Knight Corps.

At this point in time, it would be a no if I am asked if I'm attracted to Lumina-san.

I felt my heart pound but it had subsided soon after.

Thinking about the future, I'm also worried if I would be able to not only meet a girl who is related to dragons and spirits by chance but also to meet one that I

can happen to fall in love with.

I've never developed love for a person with such calibre and good personality like Lumina-san even in my previous life.

"Is waiting for this chaotic feeling of mine to sort itself out a feasible plan? Or would I be able to understand this feeling even if I talked with Granz-san, this is troubling me greatly."

"Oi Luciel, you're voicing out all your thoughts."

"Eh? I voiced it out?"

"Yeah. From sorting out your feelings to some rude words aimed towards me, everything."

"... Sorry."

Even though I've not done anything guilty, why do I have to be so troubled by it?

I do slightly regret not minding the TPO ... but, if I avoided the gratitude kiss, Lumina-san would probably be hurt deeply. (TL: TPO = time place occasion.) Well, it was done by the time I noticed so I wouldn't have been able to avoid it though ...

"Well, it doesn't matter. Leaving that aside, what did you come here for today?"

"Today, I was thinking of having a change of mood so I asked for permission from Pope-sama and I will be holding the Whimsical Day for the first time in a long time."

"That's what I thought. I was surprised because I didn't expect to be asked for love advice. Ah, that's right. Once you're done I'll give you my new recipe."

"Thank you."

There are still many dishes that I've not made but I fundamentally love cooking so I was overjoyed.

"I'll gather the patients so you can go ahead and head to the basement first."

"Okay."

I headed to the Adventurer's Guild's training ground.

The Deviant Saint Whimsical Day was held for the first time after a long time so not only those with injuries, patients complaining about lower back pain and joint pains gathered one after the other.

I treated them one by one and sometimes treated a group of them all at once.

Then, by the time I realized, Lionel and the others were guarding me.

"... When did you guys appear?"

"From the time when Luciel-sama was having love talks with the guildmaster."

Lionel answered with a smile.

"At least let me know. So nasty."

"I'd like if you don't sulk about it for so long nya. That attitude is the reason why everyone is teasing Luciel-sama just for a kiss nya."

"What do you mean?"

From the way Cathy said it, it seemed like Lumina-san was no longer being teased for it.

"A kiss between the church's top Healer and a Paladin would become a hot topic but Lumina-dono is no longer getting teased."

"... Why?"

Kefin shook his head side to side and replied.

"Probably because she overbearingly replies with "It's just a gratitude kiss?" and it leaves the impression that it would be bad if you say something bad and offend her."

Is Lumina-san the handsome guy or am I acting like a sissy, I wonder which is it?

"... If that's the case then why am I being teased?"

"Probably because you're younger and you don't carry around an intimidating atmosphere nya."

Doesn't that mean that I'm simply being made light of?

“That just makes me feel like I’m being bullied?”

“It can also be said that you’re approachable and have high favorability rating.”

“Kefin, you sure are a pretty positive thinker.”

“I’m just telling the truth.”

Ha~.

I definitely want more time to think.

What I took away from it was that I’m not consciousness of how people regularly see me.

I was shown that either way after getting teased from getting kissed.

I don’t feel that this is what being approachable means and maybe it would be better if I bore myself with more dignity.

... I have no choice but to thoroughly train my mind and body ...

“It’s a different topic but we will be heading to Meratoni tomorrow.

“””Yes!“””

The 3 of them just followed my orders without asking for a reason.

After we had our lunch in the Adventurer’s Guild’s canteen, I gave Lionel and the others free time until dusk.

After I told them that, they alternatively had mock battles with the adventurers while discovering talents and guiding them as they remained to guard me tightly.

“Aren’t the 3 of you absurdly calm?”

“We’ve been living our life in a disciplined army since long ago nya. In the past, I did look down upon the adventurers but now I’ve come to think that their life might be fun too nya.”

“I see. It’s about time, I have somewhere I want to go so you can return.”

“Call me if you need me nya.”

Cathy leaped and headed back to where Lionel and Kefin were at.

“This life is not bad ... huh. It’s true that the Saint Schull Allied Nations is really nice to live in but ... is having Lionel and the others as my retinue really the right thing to do?”

I headed towards the magic tool shop while wondering to myself about the usual topic.

“Hey Luciel, you forgot something.”

Just as I was about to step out of the Adventurer’s Guild, Granz-san passed me a collection of new recipes.

“You can distract yourself with cooking when you’re troubled.”

Granz-san who was smiling broadly was overflowing with a gentleness that was unimaginable from his usual hard-faced expression.

” ... Luciel-sama sure is popular with the uncles huh.”

“Uwa!! Estia?! When did you pop up?”

“Since about when the dishes were broken at the canteen, I was observing you from a distance.”

What ... that’s totally a phrase that a stalker would say.

“Estia came to the Adventurer’s Guild together with us.”

She came along with Lionel and the others but I totally did not notice her at all, where exactly was she?

” ... Where were you? I didn’t see you?”

“I erased my presence and hid. But no assassins aiming for Luciel-sama came so I was bored.”

” ... I see. Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

“Granz-san, allow me to come by again after a few months.

“Sure.”

Feeling drained all of the sudden, I prayed that there were products that could soothe me at Lily’s magic tool shop as I left the Adventurer’s Guild.

Chapter 141: Empire's Reincarnated individual

The girl Ryina who I predict to be a reincarnated individual.

I stepped towards the magic tool shop she operated ... but the shop itself was no longer there.

One needs to pay taxes if they are in the Holy Capital. But, they would hardly demolish a whole shop just because you don't pay your taxes.

Furthermore, with how much I've contributed by buying her products, I don't think that her shop would go bankrupt.

Since that's the case, a possible reason would be that she didn't think that there was any further need to continue staying here.

"The magic tool shop that I frequent should be here but ..."

As I intermittently let out those words, Kefin immediately went out to gather information and he returned within just a few minutes after confirming her whereabouts.

"Apparently she felt that this place was too cramp and shifted. Her current location seems to be within the Holy Capital as well and I've confirmed the location so shall we go?"

"Ah, please lead the way ... I'll ask since nobody seems like they are going to tsukkomi it but why are you grinning like that?"

I could tell just by looking that he's talked with several people.

But, this was the first time I've seen Kefin grin like that.

"I've been taught while growing up that beastmen are detested in the Holy Capital. Even more so when one's a half-breed. I thought that I would be causing Luciel-sama inconvenience when I'm together with you. However, the people on the street know that I'm Luciel-sama's retainer and they've listened to me since a while back and told me to come back to them if I have any troubles."

I didn't think in the slightest that Kefin would think about such a thing.

Is this what they meant by being thick-headed? ...

I was angry at myself for forgetting about that aspect, even though I knew that people's pain are not limited to superficial injuries.

"Sorry. I didn't take that into consideration. It's great that Kefin did not get discriminated against."

"Please don't apologize. I'm regarded favorably definitely because of Luciel-sama."

"Thank you."

Not only Kefin, even Cathy who was listening to the conversation smiled similarly.

Feeling that I was saved by Kefin's positive attitude, I conveyed my gratitude.

Proceeding along the path Kefin heard of, we were led to not the slums district but a corner of the main street.

I honestly thought that it was a considerably good location where rich people are likely to gather.

"It looks like this is the place."

" ... The lot area is roughly about 2 times larger and it's more prominent compared to before but she's just using the original building? Well, it doesn't matter."

I also thought: Didn't I do quite a good deed since the shop's grade rose due to the amount I invested previously?

Lionel entered the shop first. The figure of the speaking golem I saw the previous time I visited was there as well.

Lionel poised himself when he saw that but it wasn't an object that would be alright to break so I asserted myself.

"There's no need to ready yourself to destroy it. This golem was in the shop the previous time I visited as well. Well, it's considerably cleaner compared to the previous time I was here."

『Welcome to the Magic Tool Shop Commedia.』

Although the broken robot speech didn't change at all, looking around, the line-up of products have changed drastically and there were plenty of new products on display.

“Welcome. Welcome to the Magic Tool Shop Commedia.”

I heard the voice from the back and I saw that there was a shop assistant present to assist customers.

There weren't many but it also looked like there were shoppers as well.

“It looks like it's flourishing compared to before. Incidentally, all the magic tools that I'm using like the magic stove were all bought from this shop.”

“Hou. If that's the case then it might be a treasure trove inside huh.”

“Depending on how they are made, Paula and Rician might be able to make them nya.”

“Let me know if there's anything you want to buy. I'll buy it.”

“””Yes!“””

... I heard 4 voices overlap.

While I was shopping around the shop looking for products that interested me, the girl that attended to the customers came over.

“Welcome. May I know what are you looking for?”

“Yes. However before that, is the owner ... Ryina-san if I remember correctly? In?”

Her look changed to an inquisitive look upon doing so.

Does she oppose to me calling the owner?

“Ryina-san?”

“Yes. I have something that I must ask her so ...”

“... Please wait a moment.”

I said with a smile.

The shop assistant glanced at me dressed in my white robe before opening a door with an 'Authorized personnel only' sign and entering.

"Do you have something to do here?"

"Yeah. There's a little something I must investigate. Well, it's not anything dangerous though."

After a while, the shop attendant girl and a bespectacled girl dressed in white and with a changed hairstyle of semi-long hair from her previous shortcut, Ryina, appeared.

"Welcome. What can I help you with? ... Eh? The church personnel who bought a lot of my products in the past?"

"Yeah. I've returned after about a year to the Holy Capital so I came to visit thinking if there are any new magic tools."

Perhaps because she was wondering if it was somebody else instead of me but her grim expression transformed into a soft expression.

"It's a rude topic but have any church personnel visited until now?"

I erased my smile and tried asking to gather information.

"Yes. But church personnel are not all good people."

... Was she threatened?

Or extorted?

"Is that so? I apologize if I made you recall unpleasant memories."

"Ah, please raise your head ... because the people behind you are very scary."

Lionel and the others were releasing their intimidating aura.

I felt that it was really amazing that they could read what would be desirable to me even more than myself.

She might have her own interest in mind when she said that but maybe I should report this to Pope-sama.

"Ah, sorry. I resulted in causing you to feel ill at ease instead."

When I lightly bowed and continued to the main topic, she looked like she also

felt the same way and asked.

“So what business do you have today?”

“I would like to have a description of a single item, or a written description if it is hard to explain, it’s this item, do you know anything about it?”

I said that and handed Ryina a ring.

“Ah, that is ... Sir, roughly what position do you hold within the church?”

Although the owners are already dead, if a common man did such a thing, wouldn’t they become an enemy of the world?

If it’s a means to protect herself from threats then did she ask to properly understand and manage the risk?

“Position huh ... well, something like there’s nobody above me apart from Pope-sama?”

” ... If that’s the case, I have a request.”

After she confirmed my words while touching her spectacles, she looked relieved and came out with a request.

It was most likely equipped with the function of a lie detector.

“What is it?”

“Please make it such that those people can’t come to this shop.”

I felt that she was seriously asking given her expression of appeal.

“I understand. However, I have an exchange condition. Could you tell me what this is?”

” ... That is an item that increases tolerance to abnormal status in exchange from continuously expending magical power. However, it was robbed from me when it was still at a prototype stage.”

“That’s unfortunate.”

I returned 3 of the ring of increased resistance to abnormal status to her.

I’ll keep the remaining 4 for the time being.

“Are you sure you can return this to me?”

“Yeah. Well then, to pull ourselves back from this dreary topic, do you mind giving me an explanation for all your products?”

“Okay. Where would you like to start?”

“I’ll leave the order to you. But, I intend to buy everything that I need so please explain all the products without leaving any out.”

After I said that, Ryina and the shop attendant looked at each other and the product tour began as they alternately gave explanations.

“Thank you very much. Well then, we’ll immediately start with this ...”

Immediately after Ryina began explaining about a product, I recalled and asked.

“Now that I think about it, weren’t you working on spectacles that could use the appraisal skill? Did you complete it?”

“I couldn’t. It seems like my effort is still not enough.”

“I see. Well, I just thought that it would be convenient if we had that ... please continue with the explanations.”

Thus the explanations resumed and I steadily decided on the items to purchase.

I informed the shop attendant-san of the number of the items I wish to purchase but there was one person who was purely enjoying this shopping experience.

It was Estia.

During the product explanations, unlike her usual thin presence, she was standing in front and asking questions.

Then, I was stunned by Estia’s bombshell remark when her tension was raised.

That question was suddenly shot out when we were about to finish shopping.

“Amazing. They’re all items that I have heard of before. Perhaps Ryina-san is a reincarnated person or an existence that can be called a transferred person?”

Ryina who was talkatively describing her products until a while ago completely stiffened.

“About 5 to 6 years ago in the Empire’s facility, a certain Alice-neesan came by and told me that she was a transferred person who obtained a new body.”

” ... Where’s that person now?”

” ... She was killed. That’s why I didn’t want to stay in the Empire anymore.”

The spoken fact didn’t only impact me and Ryina, Lionel who was a general and Cathy who was a spy at that time also doubted their ears.

She openly spoke about the fact about her being a reincarnated person.

Rather than that, why didn’t the empire make use of the information from a reincarnated person?

Even though they have such strong financial power and treatment technique.

“I see. She was killed ...”

Even I could see Ryina’s disappointment.

“Alice-neesan told me various things. Things like large bundles of metal that fly in the sky and boxes that one can use to immediately find information. Many of the other things that she explained to me are similar to the products here so ... I thought that perhaps Ryina-san is also the same.”

Airplanes and ... PC? It’s the first time I’ve heard of the death of a reincarnated individual but it is quite taxing mentally.

Ryina was trembling slightly.

” ... I see. Certainly, I might be a transferred person but what about it? Does that knowledge change anything?”

The sudden question and talk about reincarnated individuals were rare in its own way so I also listened intently.

” ... She told me that in that world, there exist many books written with stories. She told me that among those, there were some that drew about love between men and forbidden love but it was the world view of the world.”

“””Ha?“””

The serious atmosphere up until then completely changed.

Was Alice-san perhaps a fujoshi?

Or maybe her level in that field was high?

I ended up feeling like I don't really want to think about it.

"Because Alice-neesan told me that, I became interested in that world's world view ..."

"... That's not the norm."

I completely agree.

"Is that so ..."

"Yes. There certainly are people who love to read those stories but it is too high a hurdle for regular people."

"I see ... If that's the case, Ryina-san knows about the flying mass of metal and horseless carriages and can make them?"

A sudden bombshell.

Answering this question would be the same as saying you're a reincarnated individual.

She's either a natural airhead or maybe she just acts that was normally but, as expected, Estia is a mystery.

"... I don't know if I can make them but the idea sounds interesting."

"You've not made them yet?"

"Yes. In the first place, my skill level is still not enough to make such things that come out in fairytales."

Even if Ryina is a reincarnated individual, can't I also capitalize on her technique and imagination?

Even though I should only be thinking about that, I asked before I realized.

"Is Ryina-san interested in developing products? Do you have any goals or aims for the future?"

Looking at me, she answered without hesitation.

“Yes. I do.”

From then on, I ignored Estia and continued the conversation.

“Could you tell me about it?”

I only spoke to her a little after that.

Then, without revealing to her that I was a reincarnated individual, I resolved to win her over to become my companion as well.

Chapter 142: Sorting of feelings

Two days after shopping at Ryina's shop, I came to Lumina-san's personal room.

"So what did you want to talk about?"

Face-to-face with Lumina-san who served red tea to me, I seriously conveyed my current feelings in words.

"Yes. If you'll allow me to say it in a straightforward manner, the gratitude kiss that time ... I was extremely happy. Especially these 6 years, I've not gone through even the 'L' of love in dating so even if it was to convey your gratitude, I was seriously delighted to receive it from somebody like Lumina-san."

"It's embarrassing to hear that combined with your sudden visit."

Looking at her slightly dyed cheeks, it can't be helped that I honestly felt that she was cute.

"Sorry. But, I thought that I should properly tell you ... I respect Lumina-san. I hold good feelings towards you."

" ... Should I take that as you like me?"

I felt that I saw some anxiety and something else in Lumina-san as she stared into my eyes but I won't deceive her.

"Yes ... however, to be honest, I cannot judge if it is due to the feeling of love or that of respect and trust as a companion."

" ... So?"

"I don't know what Lumina-san feels about me but I would like time to face what my feelings for Lumina-san are."

That's my honest feelings.

There's a possibility that it's just a misunderstanding but I want to be sincere towards Lumina-san so there's no helping it.

"Fufu. Luciel-kun is still as earnest as before. I didn't imagine that you would

come report about it in detail."

"I think it would have been fine if I remained in the Church Headquarters but I'll be heading to Meratoni to relearn various things under Shisho so ..."

"I see ... since that is the case, it's fine for you to firmly train yourself. If you win against me then I'll listen to what you say."

My delusions surged but if my goal would be to win then I have a feeling that I can't waste a single second.

"... My expedition this time is planned to take 2 months so I'll visit when I come back."

"Umu."

Lumina-san who was smiling with a slightly bashful expression was fascinatingly beautiful.

I saved Lumina-san's expression in my brain and this time headed towards Pope-sama's personal room.

I obtained permission to enter Pope-sama's personal room and Pope-sama spoke the same time the people finished leaving the room.

"So I believe you're here this time regarding Lumina? I think it's fine but I wonder what the spirits think."

While feeling disheartened that that was the first words she spoke, I told Pope-sama about the reason I visited this time.

"I didn't come to talk about love, I plan to head to Meratoni tomorrow so I came to greet Pope-sama before that."

"What, why so serious? So boring."

"Where did you hear that topic from?"

"That's a secret."

"I see. Yesterday, together with Rosa-san, my retainers and I went shopping and she mentioned that she bought gifts for Pope-sama as she has been in your care every day ..."

"Ha~ okay. Yesterday, Rosa-san came by after returning from shopping with

Luciel and others."

"Well, I guessed so."

I thought that it was the top brass of the Knight Corps, Catherine-san, who brings such reports to Pope-sama's ears but in fact, it is Rosa-san who manages the hygiene and health of the Knight Corps who does such work.

It was Cathy and Kefin who grasped the information that she apparently visits Pope-sama's personal room to hand in such reports.

"... I'll seriously spend some time and think about Lumina-san. To go out or not to go out together is given but it likely involves danger to life from here on out so ..."

"You're seriously earnest ... Fine, I'll handle the procedure for the entry to Independent Magic City Nelldal."

"Really? Thank you."

I felt my tension rise.

There's the desire to go to a city in the sky but the desire to learn attack magic was stronger.

With that, it will make it even harder for me to die.

Just by having that thought, some leeway was born in my heart.

It was such a feeling.

"I'll be troubled if you die off easily and if it goes well, you may be able to become an existence similar to my father, that's what my intuition tells me."

Pope-sama said so with a laugh as she looked at my state and I also thought that Pope-sama was beautiful as well ... I felt like the effects of once again drinking Object X was beginning to surface.

"... I will devote myself to the task. I'll contact Pope-sama when I arrive at Meratoni. I plan to return to the Holy Capital 2 months later but I'll report in if I would be late."

"Umu. Be careful."

"Yes!"

I completed my simple greetings and left Pope-sama's personal room.

Next, I headed to the training grounds where Catherine-san was looking beaten up.

"Lionel, aren't you overdoing it?"

"Cathy was the one who did that. It seems like Catherine-dono and Cathy's ability are close. Since Cathy is as you can see."

"... Totally beat up huh. Eh? Where did Kefin go?"

"He left in a hurry to call for a Healer."

Just how much does Kefin worry for Cathy ...

I drew a magic circle with 「Magic Circle Chant」 and activated 「Extra Heal」.

"To be able to control it so precisely from this distance ... you've sure placed in considerable effort."

"Effort huh ... I merely didn't want to die at that time. That was all that I thought about. So it might be more accurate to say I was pressed due to necessity instead of effort."

"It's because Luciel-sama has the talent for putting in effort and for persevering."

Lionel said to me with a smile but I could endure only because I was supported by my 「Proficiency Appraisal」.

I answered with that only in my heart.

"Please help me convey that we'll be departing tomorrow after the morning training is over and we've had our breakfast."

"Understood."

I informed Lionel and began walking towards the Labyrinth.

The monsters that came out in the Labyrinth of Tribulations returned to starting from zombies.

The number of monsters has decreased to the extent that even if I walked around the first floor, I might or might not encounter any monsters.

"It looks like it will be alright for any healer capable of chanting purification magic to serve as the exorcist."

I proceeded deeper into the labyrinth.

The number of monsters I encountered in the 10th-floor boss room was in double digits but there weren't any monsters that grouped up.

"I'm able to instantly clear the boss room with purification magic but ... if it's like this then there's a possibility that the same thing will happen again."

They may not know that I cleared the labyrinth while I was level 1 but the knights from the Knight Corps know of my ability.

In the mock battles with Priest Knights and Paladins, I would win if magic is allowed but for pure technique matches, it would go either way.

If a person like me can clear it solo, with preparation against the smell, miasma and mental interference from the Wraiths, without the bosses every 10 floors, the labyrinth may be conquered once again.

When that happens, who would be able to stop it ... my troubles didn't look like they would run out.

I decided to not clear the labyrinth and I turned back after reaching the 30th floor.

I collected the magic stones from the defeated monsters and there was a person at the shop when I left the labyrinth.

What's surprising was that Granhart-san was the replacement for Catherine-san.

Ganhart-san also likely didn't know that I was there and I felt like he made an unpleasant face for an instant.

"Thank you for your hard work. Why is Granhart-san at this shop?"

"This is my current duty. I could only think of this location when trying to investigate the individuals who went missing right before Luciel-sama cleared the labyrinth lately."

"I see. I entered up to the 30th floor but I didn't meet anybody. Do you need

me to make a pledge?"

"... There's no need. I have already performed an investigation on you ... how much hard work you put in to reach that position or what you achieved after reaching there, I've investigated everything."

I lightly withdrew from Granhart-san who said that with a snort and rode on the magic-driven elevator after bidding goodbye.

"It's scary in various meanings but if that person remains in that position, I should be able to go back with a peace of mind."

While feeling relieved, I had dinner with Lionel and the others and to have a restful sleep just for today, I used Angel's Pillow to sleep.

The next morning, we departed for Meratoni.